

UPDATE



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The Food Justice Network is a community of supporters, staff and members of Canadian Foodgrains Bank engaging in issues of hunger and injustice. We invite you to join us.

END HUNGER

IS NOT THIS THE KIND OF FASTING I HAVE CHOSEN: TO LOOSE THE CHAINS OF INJUSTICE AND UNTIE THE CORDS OF THE YOKE, TO SET THE OPPRESSED FREE AND BREAK EVERY YOKE? IS IT NOT TO SHARE YOUR FOOD WITH THE HUNGRY ... AND NOT TURN AWAY FROM YOUR OWN FLESH AND BLOOD.

Isaiah 58: 6-7

WHAT IS ANYONE DOING ABOUT THE FOOD CRISIS ?

Two months ago the media was full of stories about a global food crisis. Now they are largely silent. Did we 'solve' the food crisis so quickly? Was there really a food crisis? If we didn't solve it and it's real, is nobody doing anything?

These are all questions you may have been asking yourself. Here's our take on the situation.

1. **There is a real food crisis**, but it is not as extreme as the food *price* crisis. The world's arable land can produce more food ... but at an increasing cost to the rest of the environment. Irrigation water is the most important limit but climate change may also be affecting rain water. Prices, on the other hand, are also being affected by speculators and panic buying by governments afraid that they won't have enough food to feed their people. Some food prices have dropped a bit because there is less panic and speculation. Some increases in production this year in response to the higher prices will help but most experts say that prices will stay high.



~ CFGB Policy Staffer Stu Clark (left) reads a poster at the Civil Society forum in Rome.

2. **We haven't solved the food crisis.** We (Canada and other rich countries) have contributed more for food aid . But the medium to long term problems remain – farmers everywhere have been earning too little to sustain their operations, in many places governments have done little or nothing to help build the infrastructure for strong rural economies, too little work has been done to find farming methods that are truly sustainable in the long term (including working without fossil fuels).

Behind the scenes, there are some very capable people and organizations working to solve the medium to long term food problems.

The United Nations – in April the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki Moon, set up a task force headed by one of the UN's most respected staff, Sir John Holmes. Working with a very strong team of advisors and some of the world's top research organizations, he has been put-



ting together a 'Comprehensive Plan of Action' which will be released in time for the meeting of the world's powerful countries (the so-called G-8) in early July.

The World Bank – the World Bank has proposed establishing a \$20 billion fund to respond to all aspects of the food crisis. Many believe that the World Bank played a role in causing the problem by ignoring agriculture for so long, something that the World Bank to its credit has acknowledged in its recent World Development Report 2008.

The Canadian Government – after announcing the increases in food aid, the CIDA Minister was asked if the government was going to do more than short term responses. She said in Parliament that there would be other announcements 'soon'. The government does have a task force headed by both CIDA and the Finance Department that is looking at other responses. There is an emerging global agreement that much of the answer to the food crisis will lie with re-investing in small holder farming in the developing world. This investment needs to go for research that the farmers themselves direct, improved roads and marketplaces, stronger farmers' organizations and farming methods that sustain the local environment, especially the soil. It is critical that Canada join this effort. The Foodgrains Bank is working with our politicians and federal bureaucrats to ensure that Canada makes agriculture one of its aid priorities and targets that aid to help small holder farmers.



How Resilient is our Food System?

There is a human tendency to ignore the horizon, while focusing on the more immediate needs. While the short term solutions to the current food crisis are relatively straight forward – ensure that food aid and safety nets are in place – the longer term solutions remain somewhat elusive. Emerging proposals for this more distant horizon suggest that in the medium to long term, the world will need to focus on creating food systems that are more resilient and able to adapt to changes in the global economy, in the climate, and in the growing demand for food.

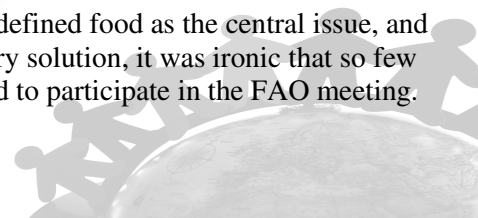
Small-scale farmers in developing countries are on the front line of the current crisis. They produce 50% of the world's food and face growing uncertainty from a host of stresses that include a changing climate, HIV/AIDS, declining governmental support for agriculture, and international trade rules that too often leave them at a disadvantage. With 60-80% of developing country populations living in rural areas, and approximately 1.5 billion people dependent on small-scale agriculture for their livelihoods, it is increasingly urgent to identify and support policies and practices that strengthen the capabilities of these rural households to cope with the rising uncertainty. Small-scale agricultural systems that foster a diversity of agricultural practices, sustain local agro-ecosystems, and build on the knowledge of local communities, will help farm families to cope and adapt during times of increased vulnerability and uncertainty. They will encourage *resilience*.

The Food Security Policy Group, a coalition of Canadian NGOs working on agriculture, are drawing together case studies from our work in the field to illustrate the kind of resilient small-scale agricultural systems that will provide the medium to long term response to the current crisis. Stay tuned to see how you can use these case studies to encourage your member of parliament to increase the amount of funding that Canada gives to support small-scale farmers.

Paralleling the FAO Food Summit

During the first week of June, about 40 heads of state were joined by about a thousand delegates and journalists at the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) in Rome to discuss the global food crisis. At the same time, and also in Rome, two hundred representatives of farmers' organizations and civil society met at the "Terra Preta" forum for the same purpose. Stu attended the FAO meetings, and Paul was at Terra Preta.

Given that the FAO defined food as the central issue, and farmers as the primary solution, it was ironic that so few farmers were allowed to participate in the FAO meeting.





~ CSO Leaders at the Terra Preta Forum.

The outcome of that meeting was a package of supports for agriculture, put together largely by governments, international foundations and private industry, to increase short term aid and encourage small-scale farmers to follow the high-input model of agriculture practiced in developed countries.

The consensus at Terra Preta was entirely different. Farmers were critical of high-input agriculture, pointing out that it ties food production costs too closely to oil prices, that it is not sustainable over the long term, and that it causes climate change. They also rejected the idea that improving international trade would alleviate the food crisis.

Instead they called for a food sovereignty approach – strong local food production systems, with minimal external inputs, and decision-making concentrated in the hands of farmers and local governments. Farmers should grow products for the local market, rather than concentrate on export crops. Trade rules should be restructured so small-scale farmers are not forced to compete against large-scale subsidized agriculture from developed countries.

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At Foodgrains Bank, we continue to ask the Canadian government to invest Canadian aid in small-scale agriculture. The Terra Preta forum confirmed that this is the model that many farmers' organizations in the South want to pursue. While discussions at the FAO meeting paid lip service to small holder farmers' needs, we are concerned that most new money for agricultural development will go to promoting high-input agriculture.

For a day-by-day commentary on the Rome meetings, go to this blog: www.whenpaulisinrome.blogspot.com/

Your Help is Needed!

Things are happening quickly in the world of food, development and international assistance. There are several important meetings coming up where governments will discuss, among other things, food aid, the food crisis and support for agriculture.

From other articles in this Food Justice Update, you will see that Foodgrains Bank (and many other NGOs) are trying to keep the pressure on governments to increase aid and to make it more effective at reducing hunger. **We need your help!**

We may need you to write or call your Member of Parliament about a specific issue. We may ask for your help in directing media attention to hunger issues and the work that Canadian Foodgrains Bank is doing.

The strategy will evolve “on the fly” as we see what direction governments take, and what issues we feel they are likely to move on.

Watch our website for emerging news on the food crisis, and a call for actions.

Go to www.foodgrainsbank.ca and click on “The Global Food Crisis”.

