

# UPDATE



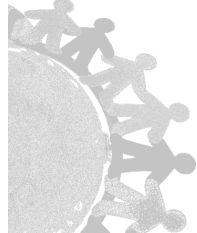
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*The Food Justice Network is a community of supporters, staff and members of Canadian Foodgrains Bank engaging issues of hunger and injustice. We invite you to join us.*

**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*



## ARE WE IN THE MIDST OF A GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS?

The world is getting hungrier. Our TVs and newspapers are filled with stories on the "global food crisis".

- Food prices in poor countries have doubled in a year
- The World Bank says higher prices will push 100 million people further into poverty
- Food aid organizations are making special appeals for money
- The United Nations has set up a special task force to address hunger.

What happened to bring about this crisis? For those who have been watching, the warnings have been building over the past few years. World grain production is growing at a slower rate than consumption, and food stocks have been declining. There are several reasons for this, some on the supply side, and some relating to demand. Rapidly changing prices also lead to market speculation, which is increasing the volatility of food prices.

**Demand:** A rising middle class in Asia (especially China and India) is giving people additional spending power, and they are choosing to spend some of that money on meat and dairy products. Per capita meat consumption in China has more than doubled (to 50kg/person/year) in the past 20 years. Feed for those livestock is driving up demand for grain. (For comparison, Canadians eat about 100 kg/person/year.)



Conversion of crops to biofuels is also diverting grain from food uses. Up to 40% of the huge US corn crop now goes to make ethanol. In Europe, the goal of replacing 10% of diesel with bio-diesels by 2010 will require far more edible oil than Europe can produce.



**Supply:** The past few years have also seen large declines in crop production in major exporting countries. Australia has had several years of drought which have all but removed them from the world export markets. Poor weather in the US, Canada, Ukraine, Turkey and parts of Africa have also reduced yields. Weather-related losses are on the rise, and climate change is expected to have dramatic impacts on agricultural yields in many parts of the world in the near future. Increasing oil prices are driving up the cost of food production, as oil is not only used as fuel for farm machinery and shipping, but is also a key input in the manufacture of fertilizer.

Agricultural yields in developing countries are disappointingly low. For explanation, look to international trade rules that discriminate against small-scale farmers, a lack of investment in rural development, and dwindling support for agriculture development from national governments and the international community. Despite the fact that three quarters of the world's poor people live in rural areas and depend on farming for their livelihoods, investment in agriculture has declined from 18% of international development assistance to only 3.5% (from 1980 to



2005). Despite a 2003 policy commitment to drastically increase support for developing country farmers, the Canadian International Development Agency has fallen short of its commitments for the past four years running.

In the short term, there is a need for increased funding for food aid to deal with the immediate problem of hunger. The Canadian Foodgrains Bank has launched an appeal for extra donations, as have many other relief agencies. CIDA has allocated more money to food aid, through both CFGB and the World Food Program. But food aid is not a long term solution.

To boost food production, we need to increase support for small-scale farming livelihoods in developing countries. They need better infrastructure (roads, research, markets, appropriate technologies, extension service), a fairer system of international trade and support for approaches to farming that will allow them to cope with and adapt to the many stresses and changes that they are currently facing.

A project supported by CFGB in Malawi provides an example of what this kind of resilient, small-scale farming might look like. Faced with declining crop yields, changing weather, low incomes and under-nourished children, the Soils, Food and Healthy Communities project engaged local farmers as researchers to identify and test new crop combinations. Over the past seven years, they found that inter-cropping legumes with their traditional maize crops increased yields (without purchased fertilizer), improved the soil (so it held water better), and led to improved household incomes. More than that, the project increased the amount of legumes that children ate, and showed a measurable increase in childrens' growth rates. Starting with only a handful of farmers in 2000, there are now almost 7,000 households following this farming system.

Canadian Foodgrains Bank and other Canadian NGOs have been encouraging the Canadian government to make agriculture one of its funding priorities. We are backing up this request with case studies drawn from our field experience that illustrate principles of resilient small-scale agriculture.

## History of CIDA's Agricultural Policy

In its 2003 policy document, *"Promoting Sustainable Rural Development through Agriculture"*, CIDA made agriculture one of its sectoral priorities, and committed to increase funding for agricultural development from \$95 million/year to \$500 million/year by 2008. This was expected to contribute to significant progress in reaching the Millennium Development Goals concerning poverty, hunger, gender equity, environmental sustainability, health and education. Agriculture was subsequently dropped from CIDA's sectoral priorities in March 2005, and funding has stalled at approximately \$200 million.

In February 2007, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE) unanimously recommended that *"CIDA establish agriculture as a priority sector using the strategies and policies developed in the CIDA policy document entitled "Promoting Sustainable Rural Development" focusing on sustainability and the reduction of poverty and hunger."* There has been no action on this recommendation.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

- Inform yourself
- Our website has more background information on food issues. In particular, see our “Aid for Agriculture” policy brief (<http://foodgrainsbank.ca/uploads/MP%20Brief.pdf>), and “Implications of Rising Food Prices” ([http://foodgrainsbank.ca/news/579/implications\\_of\\_rising\\_food\\_prices.aspx](http://foodgrainsbank.ca/news/579/implications_of_rising_food_prices.aspx))
- Have a conversation with a friend to see if you can explain the issues and your concerns
- Send a copy of the letter below to your Member of Parliament. Better yet, write one of your own.
- Arrange to meet with your Member of Parliament to ask for more and better aid for agriculture
- Go with a small group of like-minded people (3-6)
- Discuss the ideas together first, to ensure you all agree, and to decide who will present your points.
- Know your MP’s perspective. You can find some of this on the Parliamentary website (<http://www.parl.gc.ca>) Look under “Current Parliamentarians” for the name of your MP and their own website.

## SAMPLE LETTER TO YOUR MP

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am concerned about the global food crisis. As a supporter of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, I am already working to provide food aid to the hungry and development assistance to small-scale farmers in developing countries. But I don’t think this is enough.

The price of rice is rising so fast that millions more people are finding it hard to buy adequate food for their families. They are cutting back on meals, medical care and school fees in order to stretch their meagre incomes.

Though oil prices, biofuels and the impacts of climate change certainly play a role in the rising price of food, the lack of financial support for small-scale farmers in developing countries has left the local food systems increasingly vulnerable. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 60-80% of the livelihoods in many developing countries are dependent on farming (compared to less than 4% in Canada). Assistance directed to improve agricultural livelihoods is an obvious first step in reducing hunger and poverty and responding to the global food crisis.



Canada has a checkered past on this issue. In 2003, after more than a decade of steep decline in our international aid for agriculture and rural development, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) policy statement *Promoting Sustainable Rural Development through Agriculture* expressed a commitment to reverse this trend and increase aid for agriculture from only \$85 million/yr to \$500 million/yr by 2008. We were excited to see this kind of international leadership from Canada.

The initial progress was encouraging with a near doubling in the first two years, but the progress has now begun to slow. In fact, when CIDA identified its sectoral priorities in 2005 as part of the Canada’s International Policy Statement, agriculture was not included. This lack of sectoral priority has coincided with a stagnation in Canada’s aid for agriculture, such that in 2007 CIDA spent only \$200 million of the targeted \$400 million.

Both to respect Canadian public support for addressing hunger and poverty at this time of a global food crisis, as well as our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, Canada should:

1. **Make agriculture one of the key priorities at CIDA**
2. **Allocate at least 10% of CIDA’s budget to agriculture.**
3. **Direct agricultural aid so it helps small farmers produce for their local markets.**

Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

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