



# update

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Spring 2006

## What's the price of bananas?

By Heather Plett

"We grow and grow, and the prices are still low." Those are the words of Lois, a Kenyan woman who makes her livelihood growing and selling bananas. She stands in front of a group of Canadians in the upstairs room of a deteriorating building that used to house the local bank. Through the open window behind her, we can hear the sounds of the market on the street below.

"It's difficult," she says, "to make enough money from our bananas to feed our families. We sell the bananas, but we can't get good prices for them. We try to sell them to dealers from the larger towns and cities, but the roads are bad so the trucks don't come through. We can't compete against the big corporations," she says, "because they have access to the markets, and they have access to the fertilizers and labour to grow better bananas."

Lois is a member of the Highbridge Banana Association, a co-operative of farmers working together to try to improve their market opportunities, in Maragua, Kenya. We're in Kenya to learn how local projects, which receive support from Canadian Foodgrains Bank, increase people's access and right to food.

Leaving the village, our bus heads down a bumpy dirt road. We pull into a driveway beside a half-finished brick structure. "This is the house we're building," the farmer tells us, proudly. I'm puzzled by the look of it. There is grass growing

in the centre. "We started building it five years ago," she continues, "but we haven't had the money to finish it. Some day, we will finish it." Beside the unfinished structure is the mud hut the family will continue to live in until the money can be saved for their new home.

Later, after visiting the farmer's small banana field, we sit down for a lunch of ugali (a porridge-like dish made from ground maize), goat meat and cabbage. As I listen to the farmers, I'm struck by the familiarity of what I hear. My father struggled most of his life to make a living on a small-scale farm in Canada.



**Banana farmers in Maragua, Kenya**

Though compounded by so many other factors here in Africa, like the growing prevalence of HIV/AIDS, weak and unreliable government services, the threat of armed conflicts, and the lack of access to adequate education and training, some of the basic challenges are the same all over the world.

Through membership in the co-op, these farmers now have opportunity to access better markets and better prices, share the workload of selling in the marketplace, advocate for fair trade, and pool their resources for transportation and the rental of market stalls.

After our lunch, we head back toward Nairobi. On the way, we try to visit a large-scale banana farm owned by a multinational corporation, but the gate is closed and we have no access. Still on our bus, we sit outside the boundary and gaze upon the lush, green, well-groomed acres of banana trees. It's not hard to imagine how disheartening this massive field is to the struggling small-scale farmers down the road.

When I return to Canada a few weeks later, the story of the banana farmers stays with me. I hope someday there will be a roof on the farmer's house.

*After my return, I learned more about small-scale farmers and agricultural trade issues through people like Stu Clark, our Food Justice expert. For a brief look at Stu's thoughts on this, see the Food Justice section on page 5.*

# Resources

## Where farm meets city

Do city-dwellers know where their food comes from? In years past, most people had some direct link to the farm through grandparents or aunts and uncles. That's not always the case anymore. In this era of easy access to fully stocked grocery stores, it's easy to separate yourself from the source of your food - like a 30 year old woman who lived in the city and had never seen a cow.

Community growing projects exist for the purpose of providing food for the hungry, but some have an interesting added bonus - they're giving city dwellers an opportunity to learn more about farming and find out that a loaf of bread doesn't just come from the supermarket.

In Ontario, a group started a market garden, selling their proceeds to local families. In Nova Scotia, a community grew pumpkins and sold them in the parking lots of supermarkets in surrounding towns. In Alberta, a healthful muffin mix made from local flax is sold to consumers. In

Manitoba, ground beef is processed from donated cattle and then sold instead of chocolates for school and church fundraisers. In Atlantic Canada, donated potatoes from Prince Edward Island make their way to Newfoundland where they are sold in churches.

In a Saskatchewan project (which has now grown to include the other prairie provinces), city-dwellers are encouraged to become honorary farmers. When individuals sponsor an acre they receive a permit book, e-mailed photos updating them on the crop status, and a Certificate in Farming Award at the end of the year. In another urban-rural twinning project, honorary farmers from across the country pay for inputs for projects in Saskatchewan, and then travel to their fields to help pick rocks or take part in the harvest.

In all of these examples, people have found unique ways of bringing the city to the farms, and farms to the cities.

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## You spoke, we listened

In our last edition of Update (Fall 2005), we included a survey and asked for your input into the work of the Foodgrains Bank. We'd like to say a very big thank you to all who took the time to fill out the survey - either on paper or on-line. We received an impressive 938 completed surveys! Thank you!

Your responses helped us gain a better understanding of what volunteers and supporters think about the Foodgrains Bank. You let us know why you offer your support and what you think our priorities should be, and you helped us better understand our strengths and weaknesses. Canadian Foodgrains Bank is in the process of developing an updated vision and strategic plan, and your input is valuable in this process.

This feedback will also help us in another area - the strengthening of our identity. In the fall of 2006, we hope to unveil an updated identity for the Foodgrains Bank. You'll see evidence of this in a new design for this newsletter, a new look on the website, and a more consistent theme on some of our brochures and publications. We're excited about these changes and we hope that you will be too.

For your interest, here are a few of the things we learned through the survey:

- 56% of survey respondents were 65 and over

- 60% of respondents were male
- 58% of respondents were rural residents
- The highest percentage of respondents (92%) said that they support the Foodgrains Bank because it allows them to contribute to alleviating hunger. The second highest percentage (77%) said that they value the government matching funds. Third highest (65%) indicated the value of getting involved in a "hands on" project.
- Most people (93%) felt that one of our priorities should be reducing malnutrition among children. Other important priorities were: providing food for hungry people overseas (92%); helping people in developing countries feed themselves (92%); supporting agricultural development overseas (88%); and providing a rapid response to emergency food crises (87%).
- Some of the strengths most frequently mentioned were: low overhead costs, efficiency, ecumenical Christian base, grassroots support and delivery, and effectiveness of getting the food where it needs to go.
- Few people identified areas needing improvement, but those that did mentioned: a need to increase urban support, increased public profile through communication and education, greater advocacy and policy work, and more rapid response in emergencies.

# Programming

## Overview for April 2005 – March 2006

- 22,027 metric tonnes of direct food assistance shipped from Canada to Africa (Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Malawi, Sudan, Zambia) and to Asia (North Korea).
- 16,681 metric tonnes of food and 943 metric tonnes of seed purchased locally for Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe) and Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India) and the Americas (Guatemala, Nicaragua).
- \$3,389,926 has been released for food security and nutrition programming in Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Sudan, Bangladesh, North Korea, India, Mongolia, Palestine, Haiti and Nicaragua.
- 61% of food commodities have been supplied to Africa, 38% to Asia with the remaining 1% being supplied to the Americas. 91% of the food security and nutrition funds have been allocated to projects in Africa, 5% to projects in Asia, and 4% to projects in the Americas.

More details can be found on Overseas Projects section of our website, [www.foodgrainsbank.ca](http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca).

## North Korea (DPRK) Update

Since 1996, Canadian Foodgrains Bank's members have implemented a major food aid and food security program in North Korea, worth \$43.5 million (including \$31.5 million of CIDA funding). The situation in North Korea has improved significantly since the famine conditions in 1996 and 1997. The Foodgrains Bank has made an important contribution over the past eight years to this improvement. In late 2005 the North Korean government made a series of announcements to restrict and close many aid operations. The future of continued programming in North Korea is unclear.

## East Africa Drought

In East Africa, where some areas have been without significant rainfall for a few years, an estimated 6.25 million people are in need of food aid, says a recent report from the World Food Programme. Over half of those people (3.5 million) live in Kenya, with Somalia, Djibouti, and Ethiopia affected to a lesser degree. Canadian Foodgrains Bank members are currently working on the delivery of over 5000 metric tonnes of food aid to Kenya.

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## CIDA Evaluation

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is conducting an evaluation of the Foodgrains Bank overseas program. This evaluation is intended to identify ways the program can be improved and to provide a basis for negotiating a new funding agreement between CIDA and the Foodgrains Bank. We are entering the last year of our current funding agreement with CIDA.

In February and March, the evaluators visited projects in Malawi, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and India to assess how these projects were being implemented and the results being achieved. Jim Cornelius, executive director of the Foodgrains Bank, accompanied the evaluators during the field visits to Bangladesh and India. The field visits confirmed that partner organizations responsible for implementing the various projects are ensuring that food is getting to people in need and that the assistance provided is appropriate to their needs. Partners are involving local communities in the process of selecting beneficiaries and in determining many of the project activities. There was also evidence that many of the projects are assisting

households and communities to address hunger in the longer-term, in addition to meeting immediate food needs.

The evaluators will be presenting their findings and recommendations to CIDA and the Foodgrains Bank in April.



**Jim Cornelius visits Bangladesh**

## No time for Pity: A Food Study Tour Visits the Farm

A group of 13 Canadians recently spent three weeks in Ethiopia and Kenya on a Foodgrains Bank Food Study Tour. The group spent much of its time visiting people in rural farming communities that struggle with hunger and poverty. For several nights the Canadians were hosted in the homes of small scale farmers who typically have less than five acres of land on which to earn a living. In one of these villages, Kawanga in Eastern Kenya, farmers face a host of daunting challenges which include drought, low commodity prices, high input prices, poor roads, no electrical power and virtually no extension services or support from their governments. You might think that pity would be the dominant theme coming out of a visit like this, but think again. Below are the musings of two Canadian participants about the Kawanga visit:

“You can’t beat spending overnights in the villages and on the farms. It felt like we were characters in a best selling action novel. The people I met, who I first saw as hunger and poverty victims, turned into everyday families like my own. It soon became apparent that they want the same things as us, food, a safe home and a future for their children. I was constantly humbled by their devotion to God in the face of huge challenges. Our host families gave us insight into the obstacles and successes they face every day. They have become friends and ongoing relationships have been built.”

*Ron Hopper, Rimbey AB, farmer and self described homebody turned world traveller*



David Shepherd  
and a friend in Kenya

“We walked two miles under the African night sky. We came to a round house with a thatch roof. A woman and children came out to greet me. They asked about children, food, farms, education, government, ice

and snow, churches, my town and my home and the seasons of the year. I asked similar questions. Then we had a generous lunch. When it came time for bed they sent me to the wash house under a moon that had risen. I bathed in a plastic water tub with a diameter of two feet and about three inches of water. To obtain this water they had gone with plastic jerry cans packed on a donkey almost two miles to the river where they dipped it from a hole dug in the river bed. The night was gentle, and the hospitality and friendship was unforgettable. The people around that community have little by our standards. Yet they share all they have and use it wisely.”

*David Shepherd, Campbellford, ON, describes himself as a currently retired pastor*

One of the first things Shepard did upon returning to Canada was to write a letter to his local member of parliament asking the Government of Canada to do more to support small farmers in developing countries. Not because he has pity for them, but because he respects them.

### Why Visit Farmers on an African Food Study Tour?

Small farms are the epicenter of hunger in Africa. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for about 65 percent of Africans. Reducing high levels of poverty and hunger will require greater agricultural and rural development. Since small-scale farms account for more than 90 percent of Africa's agricultural production and are dominated by the poor, relief and development efforts must be centered on the small farmer. According to the Millennium Project's Task Force on Hunger, smallholder farming systems also contain 75 percent of Africa's underweight children.



Community  
members  
visit  
sand dam

**Kawanga is one of several villages in Eastern Kenya** that receive Foodgrains Bank resources to build “sand dams”. The villagers do the construction work and the Foodgrains Bank supplies the building materials. Sand dams are a form water storage technology that is used to provide communities with a year-round water supply where they would otherwise have water only during the rainy season. The villagers took great pride in showing their Canadian guests how they had constructed the sand dams and how well they were working.

# Justice

by Stu Clark

## Bananas and Coffee – a tale of two Kenyan crops

On the front page, Heather Plett recounts the story of the Highbridge Banana Cooperative in Kenya in their struggle against the power of the large banana plantations. Throughout the developing world the export trade in fruits and vegetables is mushrooming, and with it the appearance of large industrialized farms to supply this trade. In some cases, these export opportunities benefit some small farmers, like those in the Highbridge Banana Cooperative. But with the high demands by huge supermarkets of just-in-time delivery and uniform high quality, small farmers on their own or in small groups are pushed out. They are left to grow the staple crops that must compete in the local market with cheaper imports from other countries.

It hasn't always been that way. In Kenya, coffee has

traditionally been mostly a small farmer crop. In the early 20th Century, the government set up a single marketing authority that assured quality and delivery, leaving the small farmers to get on with producing the beans. Small farmers connected to the global economy in ways that benefited them. Several generations of young Kenyans attended school on the proceeds from the family's 'coffee garden'.

This could happen for fruit and vegetable producers like the Highbridge Banana Cooperative. But not without a direct action by the Kenyan government to provide or enable the structures needed to meet the demands of the present global economy. The international market of large supermarkets left on its own will buy from the plantations, unless someone sets up a fair trade marketing system.

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## Developing Country Small Farmers at the World Trade Organization

With the American Congress' deadline for a new WTO trade deal fast approaching, the wheeling and dealing in Geneva is going into high gear towards announcing a basic agreement by this summer.

After much effort over the past four years, some developing country trade negotiators thought they had a deal to protect their small farmers from having to compete directly with modern large scale farmers. Certain basic crops and agricultural products would be protected as 'Special Products' for which tariffs would not have to be reduced. Furthermore, local agricultural products in general would be protected from sudden surges of imports that could bankrupt small farmers. To do this they called for a 'Special Safeguard' that would allow them to increase import duties if there was a sudden change in the prices or volumes of imports.

After the Hong Kong WTO Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong in December, these two special arrangements were thought to be safe from future challenges. The threat now comes from a new direction. In recent weeks, a major exporting developing country has come out with proposals that would substantially weaken Special Products and the Special Safeguard, and Canadian negotiators along with some other rich countries are lining up in support. This suits the short term interests of some Canadian exporters but undermines two of the key developmental elements of the current WTO negotiations.

Normally, the developing countries that want these arrangements would have time to fight back. However, with the pressure to come to a final agreement intensifying and arm-twisting as common as handshakes, time is running out.

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## KERNEL

There are a few new faces at the Foodgrains Bank these days. We welcome the following people to the team:

In Alberta, **John and Grace Karsten** have taken over as Regional Coordinators. John comes from a background in agricultural sales, while Grace brings a wealth of experience in farming and volunteer coordination. John and Grace live in Coaldale, Alberta.

**Sol Janzen** is joining the Foodgrains Bank as the Administrator. Sol was most recently employed at Mennonite Central Committee, Manitoba. Sol will be responsible for office management, human resources, and support to the executive office.

In July, **Ary Vreeken** will be moving from Niger with his family to join the Winnipeg staff as the new Program Director. Ary has lived in Niger for the past 7 years, serving with Christian Reformed World Relief Committee.

## Resources Available

- ❑ **Brochures (Free)**
  - HIV/AIDS and Hunger
  - Water and Hunger
  - Myths about Hunger - 10 common misperceptions
- ❑ **DVD's**
  - Numbers to Neighbours
  - Harvest of Hope
  - Afghanistan
- ❑ **Food for All (2006 edition)** - a six lesson set for church schools and youth groups interested in world hunger. \$10
- ❑ **In Exile** - Youth refugee experience. \$10
- ❑ **Hunger in a World of Abundance** - an adult study guide. \$10
- ❑ **One Voice: The story of HIV/AIDS and Hunger** - a 6 minute computer-based presentation.

**Donations** to the Foodgrains Bank can be sent to:  
Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Box 767, Winnipeg, MB R3C 2L4  
or call 1-800-665-0377 for credit card or pre-authorized payment options.  
Donations can also be made online at [www.foodgrainsbank.ca](http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca).

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**Canadian Foodgrains Bank** is a Christian-based charitable organization that facilitates the collection and distribution of cash, grain and other agricultural commodities to the world's hungry through its member agencies. It is owned by 13 church agencies and is a federally incorporated, not-for-profit corporation registered as a charitable organization. Since 1983, Canadian Foodgrains Bank has provided over 987,000 metric tonnes of grain to people in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Eastern Europe.

## MEMBER AGENCIES

### **Adventist Development and Relief Agency**

Tel: 905-433-8004  
[www.adra.ca](http://www.adra.ca)  
*Board Members: Oliver Lofton-Brook & Mike Humenny*

### **Canadian Baptist Ministries**

Tel: 905-821-3533  
[www.cbmin.org](http://www.cbmin.org)  
*Board Members: Brian Malcolm & Bob Webber*

### **Canadian Lutheran World Relief**

Tel: 204-694-5602  
[www.clwr.org](http://www.clwr.org)  
*Board Members: Enock Oduro & Denis St. Onge*

### **Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada**

Tel: 416-674-7878  
[www.cmacan.org](http://www.cmacan.org)  
*Board Members: Gerry Dargatz & Earl Wilcox*

### **Christian Reformed World Relief Committee of Canada**

Tel: 905-336-2920  
[www.crwrc.org](http://www.crwrc.org)  
*Board Members: Jacob Kramer & George Lubberts*

### **Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada**

Tel: 403-250-2759  
[www.emcc.ca](http://www.emcc.ca)  
*Board Members: Paul Brander & Jim Noble*

### **Mennonite Central Committee Canada**

Tel: 204-261-6381  
[www.mennonitecc.ca](http://www.mennonitecc.ca)  
*Board Members: Donald Peters & Wilf Buhler*

### **Nazarene Compassionate Ministries**

Tel: 905-846-4220  
[www.nazarene.ca](http://www.nazarene.ca)  
*Board Members: Elaine Bumstead & Ron Fry*

### **Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada**

Tel: 905-542-7400  
[www.paoc.org](http://www.paoc.org)  
*Board Members: Kelvin Honsinger & Calvin King*

### **Presbyterian World Service and Development**

Tel: 416-441-1111  
[www.presbyterian.ca](http://www.presbyterian.ca)  
*Board Members: Rick Fee & Donna Wilkinson*

### **The Salvation Army**

Tel: 416-422-6212  
[www.salvationarmy.ca](http://www.salvationarmy.ca)  
*Board Members: Brian Burditt & David Sefton*

### **United Church of Canada**

Tel: 416-231-7680  
[www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca)  
*Board Members: Gary Kenny & Wendy Galloway*

### **World Relief Canada**

Tel: 905-415-8181  
[www.wrcanada.org](http://www.wrcanada.org)  
*Board Members: Bruce Syvret & Isaac Klassen*

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