

Food Justice Update is an occasional newsletter of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. It is distributed to supporters of the Foodgrains Bank who are working for public policies that support smallholder farmers in developing countries, the human right to food and fairer agricultural trade rules

GETTING AGRICULTURE ON CANADA'S AID AGENDA – WE'RE GETTING THERE

Ever since the spring of 2005 when the government ignored agriculture as a CIDA priority, the Foodgrains Bank has been working to get it back on the agenda. Recently we asked our supporters to help us generate the political will to help this happen. We believe that it will be impossible to significantly reduce the number of hungry and poor people in developing countries without strengthening farm livelihoods and helping small farmers cope with climate change.

We are making progress! Last summer, working with ten other Canadian development non-governmental organizations (NGOs), we started a research project that asked a local consultant in each of three Sub-Saharan African countries to canvas a representative group of local NGOs and farm organizations. They were to find out what local organizations see as the priorities for small farmer agricultural development in their countries. Reports were completed on Ethiopia, Ghana and Mozambique. These are all CIDA-priority countries so we also compared their priorities with what Canada is already doing. We then combined these reports into a joint report that identified the common themes in all three countries. A summary and the complete report can be found on the Foodgrains Bank website (www.foodgrainsbank.ca) - go to *Food Justice*.

This report got the attention of Members of Parliament. The Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development asked us to present it to them on February 1 in Ottawa. We asked them, in turn, to pass an all-party motion recommending that CIDA include agriculture as one of its priorities. We also contacted all the political parties to ensure that they would support the motion. MPs Kevin Sorenson (C-Crowfoot), Deepak Obhrai (C-Calgary East), Keith Martin (L-Esquimalt/Juan de Fuca) and Alexa McDonough (N-Halifax) were especially helpful.

On February 1 we brought one of the consultants from Ghana to Ottawa to speak to the parliamentarians and added Fidelis Wainaina, a powerful Christian woman from Kenya visiting Canada for the Micah Challenge, to our team. The two Africans were very well received by the MPs who plied them with questions for almost an hour. After a week of traveling across Canada for consultations on other matters, the Parliamentary Committee unanimously passed the following resolution on February 13.

That the Committee recommend to the Government that the Canadian International Development Agency (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.

The research report also drew the attention of CIDA officials. On February 2 our group hosted a half day workshop at CIDA offices on 'Effective Aid for Small Farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa'. CIDA sent their #2 person to open the workshop and two other acting vice presidents also attended. CIDA staff members, often quite suspicious of NGO workers, were very positive and several CIDA staff voiced their approval of the report and its contents. Several expressed their support for our push for greater attention to agriculture and indicated that, should agriculture become a priority, they would be looking to the Foodgrains Bank and the other organizations present to help in updating their agricultural development policies.

We are not 'there' yet. Strong political support is still necessary. The final decision will be up to the Minister for International Cooperation, José Verner. We may need your help with letters later this year to gain her support.

Foodgrains Bank Calls for a Better Food Aid Convention

Just before Christmas, Foodgrains Bank's Stu Clark joined two spokespersons from the TAFAD* coalition of major North American and European non-governmental food aid organizations (NGOs) in calling upon the world's major food aid donors to stop providing food aid except where it is given directly to hungry people. Some current food aid is sold on local markets where, in some situations, it undermines the livelihoods of local farmers by depressing crop prices.

The occasion was the meeting of the Food Aid Convention, an international treaty body made up of seven donor countries and the European Union. In the Food Aid Convention, these countries guarantee to provide at least a specified amount of food aid each year to meet the needs of hungry people in emergencies and elsewhere. Together, they guarantee to provide almost 5 million tonnes of food aid each year. Contributions are calculated in 'wheat equivalents to permit a range of foods to be included.

Canada promises to provide 420,000 tonnes of this annual total. However, during the period 2000-2005, Canada fell behind in its commitments and built up a 'debt' to the Convention of over 200,000 tonnes. CIDA is currently working to erase this debt.

The Foodgrains Bank was instrumental in setting up the TAFAD* group which seeks to reform the current Food Aid Convention (FAC) which was negotiated in 1999. Many of the rules of the FAC are outdated and tend to encourage some of the least effective uses for food aid. Canada, among others, wants to see the rules of the FAC improved to encourage more effective food aid. Other countries, such as the European Union, want to ensure that World Trade Organization rules to prevent food aid from disrupting international trade are fixed before changing the FAC.

The TAFAD* group is pushing for changes that would:

- Change the method of counting food aid commitments to encourage more effective food aid and discourage the least effective uses
- Improve the evaluation of food aid activities to ensure that the right kinds and quantities are provided
- Ensure that food aid provided to meet the FAC commitments is publicly reported in a timely fashion.

See the Foodgrains Bank website under Food Justice for more information.

*TAFAD - Trans-Atlantic (NGO) Food Aid (Policy) Dialogue

Charting Food Justice in the Future of the Foodgrains Bank

Over the past 14 months the staff, Board members and member agencies of the Foodgrains Bank have created a 'strategic plan' to guide the Foodgrains Bank for the next five years. Much of what we currently do (e.g. providing food in emergencies and for safety nets, working to change Canadian and international policies that can cause hunger) will not change.

However, we will be working to make some significant changes:

- Most of our food aid is provided to people who have experienced a 'shock' with which they couldn't cope. Food aid can stop them from falling further into starvation and poverty. But other kinds of non-food help are necessary if they are to be better able to cope with these shocks in the future. We are now committed to supporting this work, including finding the necessary CIDA matching funds. This could include helping local partners change public policies in their own countries.
- Recognizing that our supporters want us to work for ending hunger, we are com-

mitted to looking closely at the root causes of hunger, even when these may be found in our actions as Canadians.

- Reaching our more deliberately to engage urban churches.

These changes will affect the way that we work. They will mean that our food aid, food security, public policy and education work will often be more closely linked. This has already begun to happen.

One example concerns 'the need for a Green Revolution for Africa'. Some of those supporting this idea are calling for a standard 'package' approach - providing chemical fertilizers and new kinds of seeds. Will this kind of 'green revolution' mean that African small farmers can better cope with the shocks leading to the need for food aid?

This month a group of Foodgrains Bank supporters will visit two African countries and meet with small farmer groups to find out what kind of green revolution they are looking for. The research by this study tour will help us support practical projects and engage in debates in Canada about this new Green Revolution.

In the Next Issue:

- Report on Food Justice Tour research on the African Green Revolution
- Climate change and its impacts on African farmers

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