

# U.S. WORKING GROUP ON THE FOOD CRISIS CRITICIZES CLINTON/VILSACK TOUR OF KENYAN PRO-BIOTECH INSTITUTE

*USAID-Monsanto-KARI Spent \$6 Million on Failed GM Sweet Potato Project*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Washington D.C., Boston, MA, San Francisco, CA (August 4, 2009)** - On the eve of an upcoming visit to the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Representatives Donald Payne and Nita Lowey, the U.S. Working Group on the Food Crisis today challenged the Obama Administration's plans to fund a new "Green Revolution" in Africa in tandem with the Gates Foundation. The Working Group believes a new approach to agriculture research is needed instead of the broken status quo that emphasizes biotechnology and industrial agriculture models.

The U.S. Working Group on the Food Crisis, comprised of religious, anti-hunger, family farm and farmworker, food justice, environmental, labor, consumer and international development groups, urges a new approach towards addressing food security based on the findings of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report. The IAASTD is a landmark study conducted by over 400 scientists and development experts sponsored by the United Nations and the World Bank that emphasized the importance of investing in agroecological methods and warned that chemical-intensive production continues to have adverse health and environmental effects, while "modern biotechnology" (genetically engineered seed) has so far contributed few verifiable positive impacts on equitable and sustainable development.

In the 1990s, USAID, together with Monsanto, helped spearhead a 14-year, \$6 million project through the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) to develop a genetically modified, virus-resistant sweet potato. The project has proven to be a failure. Local varieties outperformed GM varieties in field trials. Researchers in Uganda developed a virus-resistant hybrid through conventional breeding techniques at a tiny fraction of the cost. KARI continues to collaborate with the Monsanto Corporation and USAID researching biotechnological projects, advocating a model of agricultural development that relies upon a top-down approach and unproven, expensive investments.

Ben Burkett, president of the National Family Farm Coalition, a member of the international farmers movement La Via Campesina, cautioned, "As an African American farmer who has visited farmers in Africa many times, I am deeply concerned that much of the Obama Administration's pledge to spend \$1 billion on agriculture research will be wasted on biotech research that benefits Monsanto more than it does small-scale farmers. While I applaud the

renewed focus on helping Africa feed itself, our taxpayer money is doomed to be wasted if it continues to fund business as usual. Secretary Clinton and Secretary Vilsack need to learn from previous disastrous biotechnology experiments such as the Kenyan GM sweet potato project. Many Kenyan farmers resent the U.S., Monsanto and the Gates Foundation for continuing to shove unwanted biotechnology down their throats.”

The U.S. Working Group on the Food Crisis’s vision for reforming agriculture policy to help end the global food crisis calls on governments to:

- Re-regulate commodity futures markets to end excessive speculation
- Halt expansion of industrial agrofuels in developing countries
- Stabilize commodity prices through international and domestic food reserves
- Establish fairer regional and global trade arrangements
- Direct farm policy, research, education and investment toward agroecological farming practices

Dr. Molly Anderson, a coordinating lead author of the IAASTD report, said, “The IAASTD is the most authoritative and broad-based resource available on the full impacts of past investment in agricultural development and future options. It shows that conventional agricultural practices are endangering the planet, and just increasing productivity and yields will not rectify the hunger of millions or improve the status of small-scale landholders, landless and women farmers who make up the majority of the world’s poorest people.” To reverse this, explained Dr. Marcia Ishii-Eiteman, senior scientist at Pesticide Action Network and a co-author on the IAASTD report, “the IAASTD highlighted the need for increased investment in agroecological sciences and farming, an approach considered highly promising for Africa. In contrast, the IAASTD warned that reliance on transgenic crops and chemical-intensive Green Revolution strategies was not likely to reduce hunger or poverty in the region, but might continue to benefit better-resourced groups and transnational corporations as has occurred in the past. We hope Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Clinton along with Congress will look to the IAASTD report for the best solutions to address food security and sustainable rural livelihoods for farmers.”

For more information, see:

Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy Briefing on “Why the Lugar-Casey Global Food Security Act will Fail to Curb Hunger,” [http://www.foodfirst.org/files/pdf/PB\\_18\\_Lugar-Casey\\_Full\\_15Apr09.pdf](http://www.foodfirst.org/files/pdf/PB_18_Lugar-Casey_Full_15Apr09.pdf)

Pesticide Action Network Issue Brief, “Agroecology: the Science of Sustainable Development,” <http://www.panna.org/food-crisis>, and “IAASTD Report from Johannesburg: Business as Usual is Not an Option,” <http://www.panna.org/mag/summer2008/agriculture/business-as-usual-is-not-an-option>

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For more information on the U.S. Working Group on the Food Crisis, visit <http://usfoodcrisisgroup.org>.

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National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC), founded in 1986, unites and strengthens the voices and actions of its diverse grassroots members to demand viable livelihoods for family farmers, safe and healthy food for everyone, and economically and environmentally sound rural communities.

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