

President-elect Obama presented with urgent “Call to Action” to end food crisis

Experts advise that economic reform must include sound farm and food policy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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December 15, 2008 - As food banks scramble to respond to a dramatic increase in demand this holiday season, while unemployment surges and farmers face plummeting crop prices, a broad sector of groups are calling on the incoming Obama administration to put hunger and the global food crisis front and center on its list of top priorities.

In today’s open letter to President-elect Obama, faith-based, environmental, agricultural, and hunger organizations outlined a “Call to Action on the World Food Crisis,” that includes specific recommendations for policy shifts and U.S. global leadership. The authors of the Call to Action call themselves the “US Working Group on the Food Crisis.”

“The global food crisis ceded headlines to the financial crisis this fall,” noted Bill Ayres, Executive Director of World Hunger Year. “But the problem has not gone away. In fact, the fragile economy in the U.S. and around the world has only made hunger more widespread.”

According to a recent report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which tracks U.S. food insecurity, 36.2 million people, including 12.4 million children, were food insecure in 2007, even before the economic recession. The most recent global figures from the Food & Agriculture Organization estimate 963 million hungry people, a situation that the Working Group calls “morally reprehensible” and a potential driver of political unrest and instability.

As a candidate, President-elect Obama pledged to end childhood hunger in the U.S. by 2015, and publicly recognized the deep flaws in the current global food system and the need for reform. “We want to give him some tools to reach these goals,” continued Ayres. “Addressing the food crisis well is not only more urgent in light of the economic downturn – it can be an important part of the solution.”

The working group lays out specific recommendations for national policies that would:

- Stabilize and guarantee fair prices for farmers and consumers globally;
- Rebalance power in the food system;
- Make agriculture environmentally sustainable;
- Respect, protect and fulfill human rights of farmworkers and other food system workers;
- and
- Guarantee the right to food.

In promoting these solutions, the Working Group points to recent findings by international experts under the UN-sponsored International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD). The IAASTD results, which were accepted and approved by 58 governments around the world (but not fully by the U.S.), emphasize the importance of supporting multifunctional, small-scale agricultural production to effectively address both hunger and environmental sustainability in the long term.

“We are at a critical crossroads in rethinking the structure of our food and farming systems worldwide,” says Dr. Marcia Ishii-Eiteman, Senior Scientist for Pesticide Action Network and one of the authors of the IAASTD report. “We believe President-elect Obama can and must play a key role in moving us toward a future where sustainable agriculture supports vibrant rural communities, respects the dignity of workers, and delivers safe and healthy food for all.”

“NAFTA, the WTO and other free trade agreements have pushed countries to become too dependent on highly speculative and volatile global markets for their food security,” said Ben Burkett, Mississippi farmer and President of the National Family Farm Coalition. “We need to reorient our farm policy away from a primary focus on exports and corporate profits and toward support for family farmers and food self-sufficiency.”

Dennis Olson from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy added, “There is now a global consensus that agricultural trade deregulation has played a large role in the food crisis. With regard to trade, we need to stop treating food like TV sets. Countries need the policy flexibility to stabilize agriculture markets and support their own production of healthy food – and that includes the U.S.”

For more information:

[Letter to President-elect Obama](#)

US Working Group on the World Food Crisis and Call to Action:

<http://www.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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