

American Farmers on World Hunger

In all the talk about world hunger one voice is often missing, that of the American farmer. Frequently his views are dismissed because he represents a "vested interest." And indeed the American farmer is to the food crisis what the Arab nations are to the energy picture. At the same time, he is a citizen and person of conscience, perhaps even more keenly aware than others of America's responsibility for the world's hungry. At least that is the hunch that prompted a recent "Consultation of Farmers on World Hunger" at Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa.

One hundred thirty farmers, of large and small-scale farms, from thirteen states met in late February with thirty-five nonfarmers, including world food specialists, journalists, and church leaders. The consultation was convened by the American Lutheran Church, which has a large rural membership, but the statement is clearly pertinent to other groups as well. At the end of the consultation the 130 farmers issued the "message" which follows below. The editors of Worldview invite your response to this crucial aspect of shaping American conscience and policy.

Message From Consultation of Farmers on World Hunger

We speak as farmers who are Christians. We have limitations. We see primarily one aspect of the total world food situation—that of food production in North America. Our consciences are troubled that the world's food supply is not adequately reaching everyone.

We speak from what we know best: the productivity of U.S. farmers. We take pride in that, and thank God for the gifts of soil and water and climate and technology and ingenuity he has brought together on this continent in such abundance. We believe he looks for our best stewardship of these gifts.

Our words are addressed first to fellow members of our denomination, the American Lutheran Church, and second to our fellow citizens in the United States.

I. Should U.S. Farmers Strive to Produce More?

We believe that U.S. farmers can and should continue producing food at present levels, consistent with sound soil and water conservation practices.

We believe U.S. farmers are able and willing to continue producing at present levels, if given:

- an opportunity for fair return on our investment of capital and labor; we do not ask for an assured profit, but rather for protection against a total

wipe-out economically, so that we may continue producing

- assurance that the costs of continuing to provide excess food for others is borne by all citizens and not disproportionately by farmers

We ask our nonfarmer fellow members of the American Lutheran Church and all U.S. citizens:

- to strive for the understanding of the price/market situation of U.S. farmers
- to be willing to participate in the education effort concerning the world food problem and the role U.S. citizens should carry in addressing it
- to be ready to assume our share of the cost in helping to feed the world's hungry

II What of Changes in Consumption Patterns Among the Well-Fed?

Publicity on this subject has been exceedingly frustrating and incentive-destroying for U.S. livestock farmers. This bad experience is a reminder of the need for vast improvement in communication between producers and consumers of food, and we who are farmers must strengthen our contribution to the dialogue.

We believe a major shift away from the consumption of meat by U.S. consumers, in the hope of reducing

the world food shortage, is not wise because:

- it would do serious damage to U.S. farmers and related industries
- it would not directly help to alleviate hunger in other parts of the world
- poultry and livestock production continues to be necessary for the integrity of the overall plant/animal cycle of nature
- much of our land is grazing land, not suited for food production other than feeding of ruminant animals (cattle, sheep)

At the same time, we believe that certain revisions in U.S. consumption patterns, of a systematic and gradual nature, are advisable.

1. The health of Americans would be served by consuming fewer total calories.
2. While total elimination of grain from animal diets is economically impractical except in tropical or semitropical climates, under present circumstances we encourage farmers to refrain from excessive use of grains in animal feeding. This adjustment will require education of U.S. consumers toward use of leaner meats.
3. There is waste in the excess cost required by processed, convenience foods; which are often high in calories but low in nutrition. We believe that heavy advertising emphasis on their use should be countered by better consumer education.
4. Food is usually mentioned first for reduction in consumption, but our wasteful patterns apply even more to other forms of consumption:
 - food packaging should be more modest and less demanding of products made from petroleum and paper
 - consumption of grain-based alcoholic beverages ought to be reduced
 - our use of energy and fertilizers for nonagricultural purposes, such as recreation, can be voluntarily curbed by all of us

The value of fasting has been discussed by us as well. We believe fasting is useful for raising a consciousness of hunger among many and may help us to identify in a modest way with the hungry. But we question whether any saving in food actually gets to hungry people as a result of fasting—it is certainly not an automatic transfer. We would stress that fasting is saving in order to allow giving. The second step of sharing money for overseas aid and support to self-help development programs is essential if the faster is to affect more than his own self-awareness.

III. *Implications of an International System of Food Reserves*

We believe food reserves are needed by the world for insurance against disasters and famine, and for the chronically hungry in early stages of a nation's development.

We believe an international system of reserves should have these features:

1. Reserves should be held either by producing farmers and grain processors, or by an international authority, but not by the national governments of the contributing countries.
2. The international system of reserves must include both a commodity reserve and a monetary reserve.
3. The international authority (such as U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization or the new World Food Council), with voices from both producing and consuming nations involved, must have final control of the distribution process.

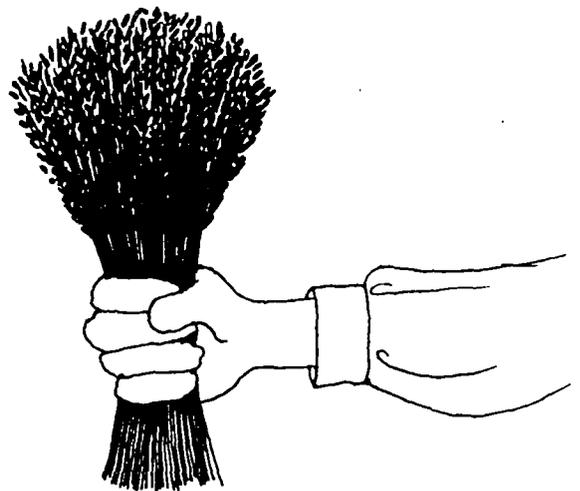
We believe the international system of reserves should include these safeguards for farmers:

- strict assurances against the dumping of food on the world or domestic market and consequent price-depressing
- cost of storing should be assumed by the international mechanism

Finally, the international system of reserves must rule out the use of food for pursuing national political goals or international power-bloc games. It must be used in ways which do not create lasting dependency for receiving peoples.

IV. *Increase of Food Production in Food-Short Parts of the World*

We agree that the only long-range solution to the world's food problem is the increase of production in areas of the world which are food-short and can produce more. We believe that U.S. farmers and our total agricultural community have contributions to make toward increasing the food self-reliance of other parts of the world. We wish to identify with those who are struggling to produce more food in the developing nations. We see a need for improving our self-education about their problems, understanding of their cultural values, and for increasing our contact with them, people to people.



We say these words of caution to ourselves:

- We must avoid intrusion on the cultural and religious values of others.
- We must preserve the dignity of those we would assist.
- We must not send what will not work in technology or technique.

These are some things we believe we can and should do:

As church

- The world mission division of the ALC should establish an agriculture desk, working with our farmers in relating them to work overseas, as well as increasing the emphasis on agricultural development in the work we assist overseas.
- Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran World Federation should be encouraged and supported by us in expanding their work in self-help agricultural and community development projects overseas.
- World Brotherhood Exchange of Lutheran Council in the USA should be encouraged to provide more opportunities for farmers to go abroad as volunteer workers.
- All work of our church in the poorer countries should be seeking linkups with nonchurch efforts involving agricultural development.

As farmers

- We are eager to learn of opportunities for voluntary service overseas and look for our church media to publicize them.

- We urge the commodity groups to which we belong to seek ways of relating U.S. farmers to their counterparts in poorer nations.

- We can seek adoption of policies by agricultural agencies which assist agriculture in poorer nations.

As citizens

- We will keep ourselves informed about world food questions so that we may communicate effectively with our representatives in Congress.

- We will seek adoption of policies by the U.S. Government, the land-grant universities, and state agriculture departments which support self-help programs in poorer countries.

- We will give of our funds directly to support self-help development work in other parts of the world.

To Conclude

We believe that food and technical assistance are two of the most important ingredients in building lasting friendship among nations.

We believe that U.S. farmers need to become much more involved as citizens in the political decision-making related to alleviation of world hunger.

We believe that our church agencies and our government should give major attention, except in time of emergency needs, to self-help development approaches rather than to direct relief.