

World food aid conference looks at initiatives and trends

Rich Heffern | Aug. 4, 2010 NCR Today

Kansas City, Mo -- From Aug. 2 to 4, 650 people from 17 countries are meeting at the annual USDA/USAID Food Aid Conference to discuss the world hunger situation and what is being done to address both immediate needs and to support long-term development of sustainable agriculture in afflicted countries.

More than one billion people -- one sixth of the world's population -- suffer from chronic hunger. Each year, more than 3.5 million children die from undernutrition. Hunger robs the poor of a healthy and productive life and stunts the mental and physical development of the next generation.

"Reducing chronic hunger is essential to build a foundation for investments in health, education and economic growth. It is critical to the sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations," said Jonathan Coppess of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency, who addressed the first general session on Aug. 3.

A focus of the conference this year is on Feed the Future, the Obama administration's global and food security initiative.

At the G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy in 2009, global leaders responded to the combined effect of underinvestment in agriculture and food security, the steep rise in global food prices, and the world economic crisis by committing to "act with the scale and urgency needed to achieve sustainable global food security." They established a framework for coordinated and comprehensive action among host governments, donors, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders. This collaborative global effort centers on country-owned processes and plans to improve food security.

President Obama's pledge at L'Aquila of at least \$3.5 billion over three years helped to leverage and align more than \$18.5 billion in support of a common approach, working with partners and stakeholders to advance action that addresses the needs of small scale farmers and agri-businesses, and harnesses the power of women to drive economic growth. Feed the Future efforts will build on the United States' comparative advantage in research, innovation and private sector-led growth. Increased investments in nutrition and agriculture development while maintaining support for humanitarian food assistance.

There was a panel discussion Aug. 3 on public-private partnerships, one of the important ways that agricultural development is funded in developing countries in the 21st century. In the 1960s and 70s 80 percent of food aid was in the form of direct government handouts to afflicted countries. Now only 17 percent of aid comes in that form. Increasingly the private sector has taken over.

Ahmadou Baba from Cameroon, CEO of Imperial Foods, described his company's construction of a plant to supply fortified noodle products to his country and others in West Africa. The plant will create 1,000 jobs and buy 10,000 lbs of cassava yearly from local farmers plus wheat flour from U.S. producers, while supplying low-cost, nutritious meals to school children.

Tom Verdoorn, vice president of Land of Lakes International Development Division, described a development alliance in Malawi in which \$3.5 dollars are leveraged for every dollar invested from the United States. In Zambia, Land of Lakes has inaugurated a program to enhance farm families' access to improved breed dairy cows that can produce substantially more milk and then help them join producer groups or cooperatives.

In another presentation on Aug. 3, Allen Jury of the U. N. World Food Programme outlined megatrends in global food security, both external and internal trends that impact world food aid. Climate change events, he said, will add another ten to 20 percent to the total number of hungry people in the world by 2050. Urbanization will also affect the hunger situation in the world as more people move from rural areas to cities. Food emergencies in urban areas will necessitate new kinds of interventions. Internal trends include an emphasis on national government ownership and more complex and integrated interventions during food emergencies.

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