

U.S. Intervention

Acting Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services

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Mr. Chairman, Director-General, distinguished colleagues:

It is an honor and a pleasure to join my colleagues from all over the world at this 38th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The United States remains firmly committed to FAO's mandate to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations and contribute to the growth of the world economy.

The 2012-13 State of Food and Agriculture report, titled "Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition," touches on issues of great importance to the United States. The United States takes seriously its role as a global food security leader, and a leader in agricultural innovation to meet modern challenges and growing demands for food.

Since the early days of his administration, President Obama has emphasized his commitment to robust U.S. leadership on food security issues – from the G8 commitment in 2009 to prioritize donor support to food security and nutrition, which led to our Feed the Future program, and through his launch last year at Camp David of the New Alliance, which is revolutionizing private investment for agriculture in Africa.

This year's State of Food and Agriculture report portrays the challenges that we face around the world – including in the United States -- the twin challenges of hunger and obesity. They are present in every city, in every town, and every school in America. There are youngsters who are dealing with weight issues and at the same time there are youngsters who are literally not well fed, and in some cases, not fed at all before coming to school.

And the impact of this is obvious. Children who are hungry or those who are overweight may suffer from will have chronic diseases that they carry into adulthood – ultimately increasing the cost of healthcare and decreasing the quality of their lives. And these young people today are the leaders and innovators of the future, which makes this also an education issue. Clearly these challenges are also economic and national security issues.

In 1946, when the U.S. school lunch program was established by President Harry Truman, he was concerned that we didn't have enough well-fed people to defend the country. And now, 65 years later, we are challenged at both ends of the spectrum and are changing the U.S. school lunch program to provide healthier food choices. The U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans also tackles these twin problems. Poor diet and physical inactivity are the most important factors contributing to an epidemic of overweight and obesity affecting men, women, and children in all segments of our society. Even in the absence of overweight, poor diet and physical inactivity are associated with major causes of morbidity and mortality in the United States. At the same time, we recognize that in recent years nearly 15 percent of American households have been unable to acquire adequate food to meet their needs.

At nearly the same time as the U.S. school lunch program was established, domestically, the United States formally launched its international food aid efforts through the Office of Food for Peace. And in the nearly 60 years since then, we have not stood still. In addition to our emergency food security efforts, we began the McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, which supports education, child development, and food security for millions of the world's poorest children. And to build on our efforts to develop improved food products, the Micronutrient-Fortified Food Aid Products Pilot Program began. This program provides grants to organizations to develop new food products that are tailored to the nutritional needs of a specific population. Products developed to-date target stunting, vitamin deficiencies, and anemia.

This is just one example of our commitment to agricultural innovation and our commitment to strengthening research that fuels productivity. Agriculture can lead the way in driving the economic growth necessary to reduce food insecurity and poverty.

American farmers have led and will continue to lead the world in innovating to sustainably increase production, respond to a changing environment, and do more with fewer resources. The U.S. Government is committed to innovation. We want to create the solutions to adaptation and mitigation of climate change. We want to encourage entrepreneurship in local and regional food systems, promoting access to investment and linking them to wider economy. We are investing in research and new technologies -- focusing our limited research dollars on targeted priorities, working collaboratively with other significant investors in agricultural research.

At the same time we are trying to address another serious problem, food waste. On June 4 USDA launched the U.S. Food Waste Challenge, calling on all across the food chain, --- including producer groups, processors, manufacturers, retailers, communities and other government agencies --- to join the effort to reduce, recover and recycle food waste. Secretary Vilsack commented that "The United States has the most productive and abundant food supply on earth, but too much of this food goes to waste." This program is an opportunity to better educate people across the nation about the problem of the food waste and begin to address it.

But we are here today because global food security is not an insular discussion; it impacts all nations. Food insecure countries themselves have to place a priority on agriculture and food security. The private sector, civil society, and donors all have roles in supporting agricultural growth.

That is why we are working in a number of international fora to build capacity to fight food insecurity, including by open access to data and research collaboration.

The United States was privileged to host the recent G-8 Conference on Open Data for Agriculture and the creation of an online virtual community for agricultural data. Greater access to these tools will

allow farmers and ranchers around the world to produce more, increase access to food and markets, and ultimately provide ladders of opportunity with improved incomes for people in rural places around the world. Data – all of the information we have acquired through groundbreaking research and investigation – is and will be a critical factor in this effort.

And that's why we are also active partners in the G-20 Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS). The work being carried out in AMIS will improve food market transparency and encourage coordination of policy action in response to market uncertainty.

Innovation will help us sustainably intensify production to grow the food we need – but trade is the engine we rely on to distribute the food for those in need. The United States remains committed to a global, rules-based trading system. Trade and efficient markets are critical to global food security.

Our global trade environment must be based on established rules that not only reduce barriers and costs, but also increase the reliability of trading systems. Our goal must be a more efficient global market that allows trade to flourish.

The three international standard setting bodies – OIE, IPPC, and Codex Alimentarius --play an increasingly crucial role today. They contribute significantly to sustainable systems for food security and nutrition by adopting hundreds of international standards that protect the health of consumers worldwide and ensure fair practices in international trade. I will be pleased to represent the United States at the side event commemorating the 50th anniversary of CODEX, on Friday June 21. Dear colleagues I hope I will see you there.

To be sure, the work ahead of us is challenging. Because of this, we need one another now more than ever. And resources around the world are tight. We will need to be even more strategic and thorough in our planning processes – looking at what resources we have and how we might bring them to bear.

The United States budget policy for all International Organizations is zero nominal growth. This is the most feasible and sustainable approach to funding international organizations in the current extremely difficult budget environment. We are ready to work with FAO to find creative solutions that express programmatic priorities but respect and work within resource constraints. We believe we can work within the fiscal realities we collectively face without negatively impacting core programs.

This is a pivotal time in FAO's history, one that presents FAO stakeholders with a unique opportunity to truly make a difference. We, the United States delegation, are pleased to partner with you this week recommitting ourselves to the important work done by FAO, reducing hunger and fostering sustainability and food security for all people the world over.

Thank you Mr. Chairman

United States delegation
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United States delegation

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