



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack: How to Avoid a Global Food Crisis

Recent news stories have stoked fears about rising global food prices. But today, only a few years after a devastating food crisis, we can avoid the mistakes of 2007 and 2008 and respond to this challenge as a country and a globe. To do so we must work with other governments to help those most vulnerable to spikes in food prices and put in place the fundamentals to feed a rapidly growing population. This means encouraging all nations to pursue policies that limit price volatility, while identifying vulnerable populations and responding appropriately.

In the short term, nations should embrace transparency and the free movement of food supplies. They should share information on stocks and production; abstain from export bans while using export quotas and taxes sparingly; avoid panic buying and hoarding; reduce import tariffs and taxes, and put in place targeted safety nets for the most vulnerable.

In the long term, worldwide agriculture has a steep hill to climb. The global population is on the rise and strong economic growth in developing countries is expanding middle classes and increasing demand for agricultural products. We will have to increase food production by 70 per cent to feed a global population of 9bn by 2050. To prepare we need a concerted effort by the private sector, governments and multilateral institutions to increase transparency and market information, increase agricultural productivity and facilitate trade.

In this effort let me also note that the production of corn-based ethanol in the US does not deserve the scapegoat reputation it has too often assumed in this conversation. The truth is that a wide range of factors influence food prices - from fertiliser and energy costs, to weather, political instability and the host of actors who touch food as it goes from farms to mouths. During the great run-up in food and commodity prices in 2007 and 2008, biofuel production played only a minor role—accounting for about 4 per cent of the total 45 per cent increase in US food price inflation.

Moving past the finger pointing, I believe that farmers in America and throughout the world will—as they have for centuries—meet the challenges in front of them. Higher prices will serve as a catalyst to increase production and to respond to demand and supply fluctuations—but only if governments, local institutions and farmers have accurate, transparent information. Group of 20 leading nations, along with other countries, should support improved data collection and the dissemination of information about physical cash markets and support improved weather monitoring, too.

Countries around the world must also embrace trade, which allows the flow of food from places with surplus to populations in need. That's why the US supports the commitments made by leaders at the 2010 Seoul Summit to resist protectionism and bring the Doha Round to a successful conclusion.

Producers across the globe must also continue to embrace existing and emerging technologies to produce more per acre while using less water, fewer pesticides and herbicides and less energy. We must encourage the adoption of proved technologies such as biotechnology, conservation tillage, drip irrigation and multiple cropping practices for farmers where appropriate. G20 countries that have yet to make a contribution to the World Bank's global agriculture and food security programme could consider making one in 2011 to increase agricultural productivity and the resiliency of low-income countries to rising and volatile food prices.

The US is helping to lead the effort to increase agricultural productivity, both in America and in the parts of the world most plagued by food insecurity. At the US Department of Agriculture, we are making investments in fundamental research to increase agricultural productivity by focusing on making plants more resilient to environmental stresses like drought, salinity and pests. We are studying pre- and post-harvest technologies to reduce crop losses. And we are supporting President Obama's Feed the Future initiative, led by the U.S. Agency for International Development, which is helping countries develop local solutions to food insecurity.

Global food security is important to the many people around the world who are hungry but also critically important to the sustainable economic growth of these nations, the stability of food prices and the economic prosperity and national security

of our own country.