

# World Hunger



## READING 1

“Stop Blaming the Weather,” *The Economist*, 15 June 2002, 13.

### -- Discussion of Reading 1 -----

1. Why has food production grown faster than population? (Better and more widely applied technology—hybrid seeds, fertilizers, and so on—has allowed farmers to coax more calories out of each hectare.)
2. What are the results of malnourishment? (Underfed children succumb more easily to disease, and are often stunted both physically and mentally, making it harder for them to earn a living as adults.)
3. How does bad government lead to hunger? (Farmers lose their incentive to grow food in war-torn countries. Even in peaceful countries, land tenure is often insecure. Also, in many countries, individuals are not allowed to own land or find it hard to gain formal title to it, so they can't use their fields as collateral to raise cash to invest in better farming techniques.)
4. What do poor countries need to be able to feed themselves? (They need property rights, enforceable contracts, macroeconomic stability, freer trade, and non-predatory government.)

5. What did the United Nations World Food Summit in June 2002 call for? (The UN summit called for more aid.)
6. What is the biggest favor the rich countries could do for the poor countries? (The biggest favor would be to give less aid to their own farmers.)
7. How are farmers protected in rich countries? (Rich countries protect their farmers with subsidies, high tariffs, import quotas, and other barriers masquerading as health and safety standards.)
8. How objective is the author of this article? (The article is under the heading Opinion, which means it is an editorial. Therefore, the author is not objective. He or she argues that subsidies and protectionism are wrong. This point is made in the two sentences below the title: “The world grows enough food. What the hungry need is economic growth.”)

## READING 2

Nicole Winfield. “Poor Nations Denounce U.S. Farm Subsidies, Protectionism Adds to Hunger, Critics Say,” *The Washington Post*, 12 June 2002, E2.

### -- Discussion of Reading 2 -----

1. At the United Nations World Food Summit in June of 2002, what did leaders of developing nations say is the only way to alleviate world hunger? (They said that free trade is the only way to alleviate world hunger.)
2. According to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman, how can biotechnology fight hunger? (It can fight hunger by increasing productivity, improving crop quality, and reducing the need for chemical pesticides.)
3. What are the main causes of food shortages in the world, in the opinion of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni? (The three causes are wars; protectionism in agricultural products in Europe, the U.S.A., China, India, and Japan; and protectionism in value-added products on the part of the same countries.)

4. According to Canada’s agriculture minister, what are the effects of the high level of U.S. farm subsidies? (The high level of subsidies depresses prices and effectively shuts out producers from developing nations.)
5. How did Ann M. Veneman respond to Romano Prodi’s criticism of the new subsidies? (Veneman said the subsidies were within World Trade Organization [WTO] limits and the United States was committed to lowering subsidies in the long run.)
6. What appeal did U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan make at the opening of the summit? (He called for leaders to make good on their promises in 1996, at the first food summit, to reduce the number of people without enough to eat from 800 million to 400 million by 2015.)
7. Write a one-sentence statement in your own words of the main idea of the article. (At the United Nations World Food Summit in June 2002, leaders of developing nations argued that the only way to lessen world hunger is to end farm subsidies to wealthy countries and to support free trade.)
8. Does the author of the article show bias in reporting this story? Explain your answer. (This article is objective in tone, and the author does not show bias. She quotes people on both sides of the issue.)

## Vocabulary . . . . .

Fill in the blanks with the correct word. Use each word only once.

subsidies	famine	protectionism
commitment	denounced	quotas
alleviate	tariffs	biotechnology

Although food production has improved because of modern technology, world hunger is a top priority to public policy experts. The right to food is a basic human right, but there are 815 million hungry people on the earth, and “about 36 million people are still dying from hunger directly or indirectly every year,” according to Jean Siegler of the U.S. Commission on Human Rights.<sup>1</sup> The causes of hunger and famine range from severe weather

1. Thalif Deen. “Rights: U.N. Says Rich Nations Fail Pledge to End World Hunger,” *Global Information Network*, 29 October 2002, 1.

conditions in desert areas to extreme poverty in the Third World, but bad government and lack of agrarian reform are far more serious causes. Repressive governments have imposed policies that prevent the success of small farmers. For example, in many countries individuals cannot own land. The poor will only be able to feed themselves when they have property rights, contracts, economic stability, freer trade, and honest government.<sup>2</sup>

Another cause of world hunger is the policy of protectionism. In 1998, Western European countries were given \$335 billion in agricultural subsidies, and in May 2002, subsidies to U.S. farmers were increased by \$180 billion over the next ten years.<sup>3</sup> Many policy analysts believe that the United States and European countries should not provide more financial aid to their own farmers. Farmers in poor countries have difficulties selling their products in wealthy countries because of these government subsidies and high tariffs. Moreover, wealthy countries also have import quotas and other trade barriers that support their economies and harm the economies of developing countries. According to the World Bank, poor countries' annual GDP (Gross Domestic Product) would increase by \$30 billion if northern protection were ended.<sup>4</sup> This increase would do a great deal to reduce the number of people who die from starvation and malnutrition.

The United States Department of Agriculture has an interest in developing biotechnology to increase agricultural production and crop quality. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman said: "Biotechnology has tremendous potential to develop products that can be more suited to areas of the world where there is persistent hunger."<sup>5</sup> As an example of this research, in April 2002, U.S. scientists announced that they had mapped the rice genome "in an important breakthrough that could help ease world hunger."<sup>6</sup> Over half of the people in the world eat rice as a staple of their diet, so this advance could "lead to improvements in nutrition, crop yield, and sustainable agriculture."<sup>7</sup>

However, critics of this policy believe that biotechnology is not the way to alleviate world hunger. According to food policy and trade analyst Devinder Sharma, "Biotechnology is the only tool that can usher in the great hunger divide—between the rich industrialized countries and the poor developing economies."<sup>8</sup> These critics of biotechnology believe that developing

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2. "Stop Blaming the Weather," *The Economist*, 15 June 2002, 13.

3. Deen, 1.

4. "Stop Blaming the Weather," 13.

5. Devinder Sharma. "World Food Summit 2002: The Hungry Will Have to Wait," *Business Line*, 6 July 2002.

6. Catherine Arnst. "A New Weapon against World Hunger?" *BusinessWeek*, 15 April 2002, 79.

7. *Ibid.*, 79.

8. Sharma, "World Food Summit: The Hungry Will Have to Wait."

countries must become self-sufficient through the use of sustainable agricultural practices. They have denounced the use of subsidies that mainly benefit American and European farmers and demanded an end to them. They are asking for the wealthy nations to support agrarian reform and make a/an commitment to free trade and free markets that will strengthen the small farming communities of the Third World.