

Vanessa Hofer

Gwen Ortman

MCC Paper

November 10 2008

### Cereal in the Cabinet

It is seven o'clock and you roll out of bed to the start of another weekday morning. Drowsy, you stumble your way to the kitchen and rummage through the cabinet full of cereal. Which box will it be today? You consider your choices for a second, and then reach for the rainbow-colored, sugar-coated Crispy Crunch and dump a heaping pile into a bowl. Next, you add the additional scoop of sugar. You complete your breakfast specialty by pouring on top a generous *swoosh* of milk. After one minute of prep, you plop down at the kitchen table, say a quick prayer, and begin to devour your sugary delight. Sixty seconds was all it took to create an instant (although unhealthy) breakfast. Most of us take those sixty seconds for granted. We become so accustomed to the cereal in the cabinet and the clean bowl on the counter that breakfast becomes a dull routine. But every three and a half seconds someone, somewhere dies of a hunger-related cause (Hunger and World Poverty). That means that in the time you made breakfast, nearly twenty individuals died. By the end of the day, 25,000 people (Compassion). In one year, four million (Think Quest). So what do we do? Stop eating breakfast?

Christians need to work together to help the billions of people affected by today's growing world food crisis. As followers of Christ, we are called to live a life that exhibits love, serving one another. Now is the time to answer that call. By making both short and long-term changes—particularly in how our government allocates funds and how we treat the environment, we can provide food to those who need it most.

There is no single factor causing the world food crisis that is forcing millions into poverty. From the crashing global markets and unstable oil prices, to degrading soil and abnormal weather, we are

dealing with the devastating results of an abused world with a rapidly increasing population (Lavelle and Garber). Wheat prices have risen a dramatic 120% in the last year. Rice, a staple food in many countries, is 75% more expensive than in 2007 (“Riots, instability spread”). Here in America, that means we cut back on what we buy in the grocery store. Elsewhere in the world, the results have been far more catastrophic. Haiti, Mexico, Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Somalia, Mozambique, Cameroon, India, Egypt and over two dozen other countries now face political unrest (Karon, Walt, “Somalis riot”). Violent riots have overtaken the streets, fueled by the cries of 2.6 billion civilians who live on less than \$2 a day and can no longer afford food for their families (International Finance Corporation).

One of the first things we, as fellow members of the international community, can do is speak out. As Americans, we have the unique privilege of being able to talk directly to government leaders. As Christians, we have the unique privilege of being able to talk directly to the Creator of the Universe. That is a powerful combination we need to activate.

Immediate relief requires extensive amounts of money. In many situations, there is a sufficient supply of food, it is simply unaffordable (Karon). “We are entering a danger zone,” cautions World Bank Group President Robert B. Zoellick. This organization, like many of its counterparts, is dealing with significant funding gaps. “These calls for help outstrip our available grant resources,” warns Zoellick. The World Food Program, another aid organization similar to World Bank, predicts it will need an additional \$500 million to combat worsening worldwide conditions (Walt). “The international community needs to step up to this challenge,” says Zoellick (World Bank).

First and foremost, the United States must reconsider how tax money is distributed, especially during this period of economic recession. Our country spends 623 billion dollars on the Department of Defense, ten times more than China, who ranks second. All the military budgets in the world added together are less than the United States (Qugley). The American food aid budget rests at 1.2 billion (Washington Post). Imagine if even a small fraction of our military money was used to help the starving.

Instead of being a violent threat, America would become a peaceful rescuer. The world would not want to fight the United States because they would depend on its aid to feed the hungry.

America's aid efforts need to be better regulated. Currently, United States law requires that relief food be taken from the American farmers' surplus and then shipped overseas to the crisis areas. Transportation costs, among others, are draining the amount of money being put towards food supplies. Furthermore, handing out American food is hurting the sales of the desperate farmers from the poverty locations (Washington Post). By buying a portion of our relief food from farmers nearer to the areas in need, we can eliminate our additional costs and help poor farmers. America will then be able to use its remaining surplus to assist its own poor or to aid developing areas of agricultural study.

Money, however, is only a short-term solution. To prevent a repeat of today's world food crisis in the future, efforts must be made to permanently improve the environment. Polluted air, water, and soil are preventing some farmers from producing food (Mann). Many scientists blame global warming from energy pollution for the rise in natural disasters destroying crops (Morris). God calls us to be stewards of the earth. In the Genesis creation story, God says, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ([The Holy Bible](#), Genesis 1:26 NIV) If we want the earth to provide food, we have to take better care of it. That begins with the soil.

Many countries, particularly in Africa and the Hispaniola, are unable to grow crops because of unfertile land (Bourne). In 1991, the International Soil Reference and Information Centre, located in the Netherlands, reported that humans have depleted nearly 7.5 million square miles of land, approximately the size of the United States and Canada combined. With a population expected to reach 8.3 billion by 2030, the world cannot afford to continue to reducing productive land at that rate (Mann). Rattan Lal, a soil scientist at Ohio State University, stresses the role good soil plays in solving many of the world's

problems. “Political stability, environmental quality, hunger, and poverty all have the same root. In the long run, the solution to the earth is restoring the most basic of all resources, the soil” (90).

How do we fix our soil? We can start by preserving what we already have and helping teach others to do the same. Currently, 89% of the earth’s surface is not farmable. We have to take care of every bit of that remaining 11% percent (93). To achieve this goal, farmers should practice sustainable farming techniques, “farming methods that maintain productivity, soil fertility, and a healthy ecosystem over a long time.” Examples of this are crop rotation, cover crop, and ridge till (Goettemoeller and Goettemoeller). We need to support organizations such as the Mennonite Central Committee that send volunteers overseas to teach these types of basic techniques to farmers. Giving food is only a temporary fix. Showing farmers how to better use their soil enables them to support their families for years to come.

As for the large portion of land that is already degraded, we have to get our hands dirty and explore new options. One possible clue may be in *terra preta*, a rich black dirt found in the Amazon. Scientists hope to discover how to transfer its fertile qualities into the worthless soil that plagues many third world countries (Mann). These types of investigations are crucial to feeding future generations.

Beyond soil conservation, there are other small—but important—environmental changes we can establish. America throws away 96 billion pounds of food every year. That totals 320 pounds per person (Lavelle and Garber). Picture the difference if all American citizens would take only what they need. Picture the difference if we stopped polluting the air we breathe and the water we drink to ensure that our crops and livestock grow in the best environment possible. Picture the difference if we all would consume just a little less meat to keep the grain prices just a little bit lower for the poor family at the end of the chain (Lavelle and Garber). Picture the difference if everyone was working to stop this infectious disease called greed.

Take action! Talk to government officials and share the desperate message of millions. Donate to organizations seeking to provide relief to the starving. Change wasteful habits that are hurting our earth's ability to supply food. Pray with fellow believers for guidance. Above all, approach the world food crisis with an attitude of service and love. "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." (The Holy Bible, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:2-3 NIV) Let love be the light that guides our response.

Stand up and speak out! It is time to make a move! "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in" (The Holy Bible, Matthew 25:35 NIV). Know that you can make a difference, that because of your contribution someone else, somewhere else, can enjoy breakfast, too.

## Works Cited

Bourne, Joel K. Jr. "Dirt Poor." National Geographic September 2008: 110.

Compassion. What is the global food crisis? 2008. October 2008

<<http://www.compassion.com/sponsordonor/global-food-crisis/about-the-global-food-crisis.htm>>.

Goettemoeller, Jeffrey and Adrian Goettemoeller. Sustainable Ethanol. Maryville, Missouri: Prarie Oak Publishing, 2007.

Hunger and World Poverty. Hunger and World Poverty. 17 October 2008 <<http://www.poverty.com/>>.

International Finance Corporation. Creating Opportunity. 2008. 2008

<[http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/annualreport.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/AR2008\\_Chapter1/\\$FILE/AR2008\\_Chapter1.pdf](http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/annualreport.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/AR2008_Chapter1/$FILE/AR2008_Chapter1.pdf)>.

Karon, Tony. How Hunger Could Topple Regimes. 11 April 2008. 7 October 2008

<<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1730107,00.html>>.

Lavelle, Marianne and Kent Garber. 8 Way to Fix the Global Food Crisis. 9 May 2008. 17 October 2008

<<http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/2008/05/09/8-ways-to-fix-the-global-food-crisis.html>>.

Lewis, David and Simon Robinson. Somalis riot over food prices. 7 October 2008

<<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/africa/05/05/somalia.riot/index.html>>.

Mann, Charles C. "Our Good Earth." National Geographic September 2008: 80-107.

October 2008 <<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/plantsci/crops/eb48-1.htm>>.

Qugley, Bill. Social Justice Quiz. 13 September 2008. 17 October 2008

<<http://www.chicago.indymedia.org/newswire/display/83794/index.php>>.

Riots, instability spread as food prices skyrocket. 14 April 2008. 7 10 2008

<<http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/americas/04/14/world.food.crisis/>>.

The Holy Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House

Walt, Vivienne. The World's Growing Food-Price Crisis . 27 February 2008. 7 October 2008

<<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1717572,00.html?iid=sphere-inline-sidebar>>.

Washington Post. Food Crisis. 14 March 2008. 7 October 2008

<<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/americas/04/14/world.food.crisis/index.html#cnnSTCVideo>>.

World Bank. World Bank President to G8: 'World Entering a Danger Zone'. 2 July 2008. 7 October 2008

<<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:21828803~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html#geo>>.