

*While the Green Revolution and economic aid may seem like good solutions for world hunger, eating locally and supporting sustainable agriculture through education and action will produce better long-term results. The World Hunger Relief Farm near Waco, TX, provides a model for positive change. This article focuses on a pragmatic response to a widely-misunderstood problem.*

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## **Think Globally, Eat Locally**

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We live in a world of contradictions: bigger houses and smaller families; longer workdays and fewer vacations; a surplus of food and 800 million hungry people (Cunningham and Cunningham 171). The balance is so far tipped that it seems natural to find ripe bananas in December or six different varieties of apples waiting at the local grocer. The fact that our produce generally travels around 2,000 km before anyone ever takes a bite out of it never makes the front page news (Cunningham and Cunningham 185).

The idea of eating locally-grown food is foreign to most people in the Northern Hemisphere. Industrialized nations import \$60 billion worth of food annually from developing countries. In South America, farmers are left with less than a penny on the dollar while traders, shippers, and retailers reap profits at an alarming rate (Lappé 5). The latter take home 80 percent of the profits, while farmers only receive 20 percent.

Instead of supporting local farmers and the local economy, the United States consumer inadvertently picks the South American pocket. Sadly, the majority of the people in producing countries, farmers and non-farmers alike, are left hungry. According to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1997), 78 percent of all malnourished children under the age of five live in countries with a food surplus (Lappé 9). In fact, in every region except Africa, food production has increased at a higher rate than population growth (Lappé 9).

These inequities can be addressed to some extent by a two-pronged effort. On the supply side, there is a need to raise awareness in developed nations of the importance of decreasing imports from the developing world; on the demand side, we must train food producers in developing nations to use sustainable, self-sufficient methods that will most efficiently feed the local population. What hungry people need is someone who understands their plight and will find a way to work with the limited resources of the land in a way that will not compromise the ability of future generations to do the same. World hunger is, of course, an extremely complex problem rooted in global politics and economics. Still, significant strides can be made in these areas by means of efforts like that of the World Hunger Relief Farm (WHRF) near Waco, Texas. With a mandate to train agricultural workers, educate the local community about world hunger, and provide on-site assistance in developing nations, the WHRF staff is working to reverse the trends of dependence and exploitation of food producers in the developing world.

Before turning to a detailed assessment of the farm's activities and impact, I will first survey some recent research on effective and ineffective solutions to world hunger. The research of Francis Lappé has refuted many prevalent myths about causes of and solutions for world hunger today. In particular, he shows the "silver bullet" solutions of the Green Revolution and food aid to be ineffective in addressing world hunger.

### **The Green Revolution**

The Green Revolution, the idea that "miracle seeds" that increase a farmer's yield would end hunger one family at a time, has been widely accepted as a panacea for world hunger (Cunningham and Cunningham 186). This movement, however, assumes that more food means less hunger. The Green Revolution focuses on increasing production, but neglects the more entrenched social and political causes of poverty and subsequent hunger (Lappé 59). If the world already has a surplus of food, then what is to be gained through the Green Revolution?

In fact, the Green Revolution has not worked to alleviate hunger in the areas where it has been tried. Genetically engineered crops are expensive to implement and only benefit a "few wealthy landowners at the expense of poor farmers" (Strauss 107). As

evidence, Strauss shows that while the global price of food declined as a result of the Green Revolution, hundreds of millions of people remained undernourished. If genetically modified organisms were a solution to world hunger, then there would not be a large number of hungry people in the areas that implemented GMOs. According to a quantitative study of research reports on the Green Revolution, food distribution inequality increased over a thirty-year period for 80 per cent of the reported countries that used GMOs. This is true of areas in Latin America, India, and the Philippines (Lappé 65).

Moreover, “miracle seeds” have unintended negative consequences for producers. According to Mark Strauss, the idea of small farmers across the globe becoming dependent on sophisticated technology is disastrous. He claims that “multinational biotech firms [could] exploit world hunger to secure monopolistic control over the food supply of the developing world” (106). With this technology in use, industrialized nations still hold all the cards, and developing countries remain powerless (Lappé 60). The Green Revolution is more likely to increase the gap between rich and poor—the well-fed and hungry—than to solve the actual problem of hunger. Producing genetically modified crops in third world countries perpetuates inequality, creates false hope for the poor, and is not a long-term solution.

### **Increased Aid**

Many wish to combat hunger through increases in the level of U.S. aid and involvement in developing countries. Historically, this involvement has not proved fruitful for those countries since its emphasis was not on hunger, but on foreign policy (Lappé 130). A possible alternative is offered in *The Economist*:

Although the case for reducing poverty by sending more aid to the poorest countries has some merit, the experience of China, South Korea, Chile, and India shows that the much better and more powerful way to deal with poverty is to use the solution that worked in the past in America, Western Europe, and Japan: open, trading economies (12).

According to Lappé, *The Economist* is only partially correct; sending more aid is not the solution, but neither is opening

international markets for free trade. Instead, a “profound, society-wide change in control over food-producing resources” is needed to reduce poverty and end world hunger (131). Simply increasing the budget devoted to developing countries may quiet our conscience, but it does not necessarily feed the hungry.

Specifically, farmers in third world countries could play a pivotal role in reversing world hunger if only they had the agricultural and educational resources to do so. Organic farming techniques that operate on a level beyond subsistence and knowledge about ways to escape “serfdom” to create a better life for their families are both solutions that address the underlying causes of world hunger: powerlessness and poverty.

### **Causes of Hunger**

Hunger is caused by poverty, which is created by a lack of resources to achieve success (Lappé 1). Giving more money to the poor, or producing more food through genetically modified crops, does not address the issues of powerlessness and sustainability that farmers face in third world countries. As long as they are dependent upon another nation for their agricultural productivity, these farmers can do nothing for their own welfare. Rather than creating a new way for developed nations to control the resources, a real solution would empower the poor to provide for themselves. Systems that focus on increasing awareness about world hunger are the first step toward creating a real plan to fight it (Lappé 7). Once we understand the root causes of hunger, we can move toward solutions that will allow the current hungry people of the world to provide for themselves, have economic freedom, and protect the environment through sustainable agriculture.

According to Dale Barron, the Development Director of the World Hunger Relief Farm (WHRF), when third world farmers are taught economically- and ecologically-sound farming methods, they begin to move away from dependence on exporting goods to the United States to providing food for themselves and their country. The WHRF combines increased awareness at the local level with the call to bring that knowledge to a famished world. Barron believes that ending world hunger through sustainable development is possible; he also believes that across an ocean and a hemisphere, everyone can play a part in it.

### **A Local Alternative**

Drive down I-35, pull a U-turn around Lacey Lakeview, break a host of traffic rules, and you will set foot on foreign, organic soil. Welcome to the World Hunger Relief Farm: a 42-acre plot of land where a staff of ten is working to change the future of agriculture.

“We feel like organic methods, as a long-term approach, are the most effective [farming techniques] because we aren’t fighting or struggling with the earth, but cooperating with it,” Barron said. Since its charter in 1976, the farm has undergone several expansions. Originally founded with the principal goal of training missionaries in agriculture to go overseas, the farm has expanded to include educating the local population about sustainable development.

Barron, a Baylor University graduate with a BA in social work, has many responsibilities on the business side of the farm, ranging from public relations to accounting. “A lot of what I do for the farm isn’t exactly what I was trained in, but I don’t mind; I’m learning as I go,” stated Barron. His chief responsibility is support development, coordinating the grants and private donations that help keep the farm running.

Neil Rowe, who received his master’s from Cornell University in plant pathology, is the farm’s executive director. Rowe worked for ten years as a missionary in Haiti and Uganda and also as a private crop consultant in Michigan. He conducts classes for the farm’s interns twice a week on sustainable development and oversees the operations of the farm.

### **Purposes of the Farm**

As a registered 501(c) 3 non-profit organization with a tri-fold purpose to train agricultural workers, educate the local community about world hunger, and provide on-site assistance in developing countries, the farm is doing its part to harvest leaders who will multiply and sustain the future.

#### *Train*

According to Barron, over 300 interns, hailing from places from Waco to Kenya, have completed the one-year internship at the farm, and most travel abroad to practice sustainable agriculture overseas. Interns arrive in January, May, and September and are offered on-site housing in addition to a

stipend and health insurance. Through their training, the interns become a conduit of agricultural knowledge locally and globally. The interns learn about practical, sustainable farming methods that are easy to implement in developing countries.

The program consists of farm labor, classes on agriculture, livestock, and Christian missions twice a week, as well as an opportunity to work in Ferrier, Haiti for three months. Interns also help teach community classes, lead tours, and speak at area churches and organizations. "We wanted to provide a combination of classroom and experiential education," Barron explained. All interns have an assistantship for which they are partnered with a staff member and are responsible for one of six areas: livestock, pecan orchard, vegetables, urban gardening, education, or the village store. In exchange for daily service in one of these areas, the tuition is waived.

The training also covers what Barron refers to as the "seed to market" process. Interns are involved in the entire development of agriculture from cultivation of the crop, to harvesting and selling it at a local market. In addition to teaching the interns basic economic principles, the food sold generates 20 percent of the revenue for the farm.

When interns complete the program at the farm, they have agricultural knowledge and skills applicable in developing countries. Whether they are working in Texas or Tahiti, their sustainable farming methods are fighting world hunger by creating opportunities for small farmers to become self-sufficient.

### *Educate*

Although community education was not in the original blueprint of the WHRF, it quickly became an issue. "Teaching children from a young age where the food in the grocery store comes from, and what people have to do to get it there, is a valuable service," Barron said. Approximately 1,200 school-age children come through the farm each year to participate in activities ranging from touching, tasting, and feeling food and animals, to exploring what it means to be a good steward of the earth.

In addition to grade-school education, other programs target the college population. For \$50, students can participate in an

overnight poverty simulation that raises awareness of the plight of the poor. Students live in a home with no running water or electricity and must make choices about how to use the limited resources on the farm. "Our overnight hunger simulation, 'living on the other side,' takes the issue of hunger and makes it a relevant issue, shows students that it exists, it can be solved, and shows them that they can do something on a local level to help," Barron said. The educational programs at WHRF bring hunger to life for members of the Waco community and open a dialogue about the root causes of hunger.

### *Assist*

The farm does not necessarily place its interns in a long-term project, but almost all of the interns use their training as a way to help with hunger problems. "We have a long-standing history with many missionary and humanitarian-type organizations, and we eagerly connect our interns with groups that allow them to use what they have learned here to improve farming methods across the globe," Barron stated.

As of 2005, over twenty countries have benefited from the education and mobility efforts of the WHRF, ranging from Central and South America to Ethiopia and India. A sister organization, World Hunger Relief Farm-Haiti, now functions primarily through the indigenous people of Ferrier ("Helping the People of Haiti"). WHRF established a farm in Haiti in 1989 and has since completed construction of a seven-room school capable of housing up to 150 students ("Helping the People of Haiti"). The Haitian staff was trained by representatives of the WHRF-Elm Mott, and they continue to provide financial and technical assistance. "Our ideal situation is not to become the only sustainable farm in the country, but to empower the local people with knowledge and skills to provide for themselves. The systems we implement are reproducible; the local people are able to use our methods long after we leave," Barron said.

While the farm is not a "sending agency" like the Peace Corps or the International Mission Board, the staff would like to increase their work with overseas operatives. "We are looking primarily at growth in terms of our on-site assistance program. We feel like a higher level of communication between the farm and its former interns overseas is the most important expansion we could make right now," Barron said.

## **Farm Finances**

The WHRF is a non-profit organization that is supported through a combination of grants, private donations, and farm products. The bulk of support comes from private donations. “We are a faith-based organization that seeks a balance between productivity and education,” Barron explained. Most of the farm’s expenses stem from the intern training process.

While government grants are not yet a reality, Barron hasn’t ruled them out for the future. “We tend to stick with smaller, private grant makers, rather than large governmental ones that require extensive reporting and accounting,” Barron said. Last year, the total revenue for the farm was \$260,000, a figure that has more than quadrupled since Barron became the development director in 2000.

The crops grown and harvested by the interns help to offset the costs somewhat. Pecans and vegetables are the leading cash crops at the farm, contributing more financially than meat products. Some of these products are distributed through the farm’s “food club,” a membership program consisting of about fifty families. In exchange for their membership fee, families receive fresh, seasonal, local farm products. The organic crops are picked and sold the same day and provide the community with nutritious, preservative-free foods while supporting the operation of the farm. By encouraging the purchase of seasonal, locally-grown produce in this way, the farm models an important part of the solution to global hunger.

Another dual-purpose project is the village store. Fairly traded arts and crafts are sold from the farmhouse at prices set with input from the artisans in the developing world. “While we do make a profit from the store, the main purpose is to show how trade could be done worldwide with a little bit more of a conscience,” Barron said.

## **Why It Works**

The community at the WHRF is committed to fighting world hunger through its efforts of agricultural training, local education, and assistance in foreign countries. They not only advocate simple living and organic farming but also are living proof that such methods work. While increasing foreign aid only addresses the short-term, economic misfortune of the hungry, the



WHRF teaches the hungry how to live in a way that is truly sustainable. Increased technology complicates farming, further shifts the power pendulum to the wealthy, and has uncertain long-range effects. As awareness about the root causes of hunger spreads across the globe, the opportunity arises to address the real problems of powerlessness and poverty that beget hunger.

The world hunger crisis is not inevitable or excusable. The citizens of developed nations of the world have a moral obligation to be conscientious consumers and a responsibility to know where their food supply originates. Through efforts to eat seasonally and locally, consumers are taking a stand and expressing a desire for change. As the focus moves from buying the cheapest cantaloupe to supporting local businesses and farmers, the balance shifts to keep goods and money in the hands of the producers rather than the traders, shippers, and retailers. World hunger will not be solved overnight, but through increasing education about the issues, training others in sustainable agriculture, and implementing organic farming methods, we can do our part to feed the world.

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