

Note: This Plan to achieve a Sustainable Food Security Convention will require a comprehensive decentralized global strategy for its implementation. We welcome everyone to use the concept and this document in any way that may help. It is being continually revised. Please send comments to Karen Lehman, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. Fax: (612) 870-4846 or Email: <klehman@iatp.org> Thank you.

Plan of Action to Achieve Universal Food Security

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Background:

Multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) are narrowly focused on promoting the idea that food security can be bought and sold on the world market. Price volatility in the past few years has created a crisis for agricultural producers. Food aid and reserve policy in exporting countries has changed such that food deficit countries are now encouraged to protect food security by purchasing options in the global grain markets.

The primary goal of an internationally coordinated approach to food security is to increase stability in the food supply by reducing volatility in agricultural markets, and by making food production and distribution systems sustainable over the long term. Such an approach requires that food security be planned and implemented primarily at the local and national levels with support for diversified peasant and family farm systems. Trade can complement domestic food security strategies, but it cannot be allowed to replace them.

Why a convention?

Multilateral collaboration on the development of a viable global food security system is more important than ever with the passage of the Uruguay Round trade agreement. With significant power over agriculture policy shifting to the World Trade Organization, farmer, consumer, and environmental organizations, as well as national governments, have lost many of the policy tools they once could employ to defend food security. There is a great need for a global debate on forms of multilateral collaboration that place food security, not trade, as the highest priority. Key to this debate is the role that civil society can play, not only in collaboration with national governments, but in a process of negotiation under UN auspices to bring food security strategies into equilibrium among civil, government and private interests.¹

Conventions are treaties. They are instruments for building accountability within the structure of international law. There are conventions to protect the atmosphere from

¹Such a process of negotiation could be conducted through a system of "open negotiating tables" at the local, regional, and international levels in which all significant actors have the right to intervene.

ozone depleting chemicals and to protect the Earth's biodiversity, as well as to reduce the risk of nuclear war. The time is ripe for a convention to protect the Earth's people from hunger. With a convention in place, nations create the framework to define specific conditions under which food security, not trade alone, must be the highest priority in the development and implementation of local, national, and international agriculture and trade policy.²

Toward a Sustainable Food Security Convention

It is time to begin negotiations for a Sustainable Food Security Convention to assist governments and civil society in their responsibility to achieve food security and to establish a global network of local, national and regional reserves.

Basis for Action:

1. Food security policy must help reduce the volatility of agricultural production cycles, markets, and prices. Farmers³ and consumers suffer at both ends of boom and bust cycles. Surpluses drive down agricultural prices and bankrupt farmers, while shortages raise prices beyond the ability of consumers to buy basic staples.
2. National governments, in conjunction with civil society, have the responsibility to guarantee adequate production and equitable access to safe, adequate, nutritious food supplies for their citizens. To do so, they must design and implement policies that protect the long-term capacity of farmers to produce food domestically in diverse agro-ecosystems. These include policies to protect domestic staple food production from export dumping; strategies to control, utilize, develop and protect land, water and genetic resources; and programs to ensure access to these resources for all farmers, including women and ethnic and racial minorities.
3. Global food stocks are poorly distributed between a few large exporting countries that produce more than their regional needs, and regions of the world that have become

²Many existing multilateral agreements and Conventions, as well as the Draft Plan of Action, provide the underpinnings for the Sustainable Food Security Convention. A short list includes:

- The Draft Plan of Action Objective 7.4, "To better define and further develop the Right to Food and propose ways to implement this right as an instrument to achieve food security."
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- The United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- ILO Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries
- The Convention on Biological Diversity

³Throughout the text, the word "farmers" refers to peasant and family farmers, as well as other food producers such as fisherfolk. Corporate agriculture and agribusiness are not included in this term.

dependent upon imports from exporting countries. Food security strategies must take into account the differences between food surplus and food deficit countries and be structured accordingly.⁴

True food security depends on the capacity of peasant and family farmers to produce and store food locally for times of shortage, on decreased volatility in supplies and prices, and on reduced transport costs. Cereals, pulses and vegetables traditionally grown in a given region are generally better adapted to local climate and soil conditions, and require less purchased chemical inputs.

Actions:

1. The Food and Agriculture Organization should convene a process involving the General Assembly of the United Nations in negotiations for a Sustainable Food Security Convention. The intent of the Sustainable Food Security Convention is to elevate food security to the highest level of priority within international policy. Such a Convention would have five primary purposes:

a.) To help national governments develop and implement national food security plans. These would include the identification of staple foods (primarily grains and legumes) and foods that provide micronutrients essential to domestic food security. These staple foods could be exempted from WTO rules and disciplines when said rules undermine national food security plans.⁵ Plans would also include policies to enhance farmers' capacity to provide nutritious and safe foods through diversity-based sustainable systems.

⁴Policies structured for food deficit countries could include the use of anti-dumping tariffs and prior informed consent for concessional food trade. For food surplus countries, they could center on access to food by the poor, support for local and regional food systems, and prohibitions against food dumping, export manipulation or harmful food aid policies.

⁵This question of staple foods requires more discussion. Many countries have consistently treated staple foods differently in domestic agriculture policy and have attempted to protect them from cheaper imports on the world market. Examples include the Canadian supply management system for dairy, poultry and eggs, and Mexico's former system of import licensing requirements, price supports for farmers, and subsidies to consumers for staples like corn and beans. Until the Uruguay Round was passed, countries with domestic supply management programs in place were able to restrict imports under Article 11. Under the logic of the Uruguay Round, all foodstuffs are commodities and should not be treated differently because of their importance to domestic food security.

There are several basic perspectives on the question of staple foods and their treatment under international trade regimes. Some believe that a proposal to permit exemptions from WTO regimes for staple foods is a viable one that can garner support from a broad range of allies, not only in low income food deficit countries, but in countries like Korea and Japan that worked hard to protect its staple food, rice, during the Uruguay Round. Some fear that singling out any crop for different treatment could lead to overproduction and surpluses in that crop. Others question the viability of defining staple foods. Still others think it is too provocative to the global trade regime to suggest treatment for staple foods outside the confines of the WTO, preferring instead to insert safeguards for food security in the WTO.

This proposal for a Convention suggests that staple foods, when they are part of domestic food security plans, should be exempt from WTO rules if these undermine said domestic food security initiatives. Conditions under which nations could exercise this exemption to WTO rules would be similar to those

b.) To develop an obligatory structure for consultation and negotiation that ensures that all actors (governments, nongovernmental organizations, and constituency-based organizations) have the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of proposals to advance food security at the local, national, and international levels.

c.) To coordinate the creation and management of an international network of local, national and regional food reserves. The Convention would also provide for an independent grain auditing system.

d.) To facilitate the development of international commodity agreements among importing and exporting countries. Such agreements could be structured both for concessional food transfers and to supplement domestic production to meet national demand for staple foods. In both cases, the goal is to ensure that demand is met without export dumping.⁶

e.) To create financial and technical mechanisms incorporated in and financed by the Convention to aid governments in disputes with other entities such as the WTO that might arise over food and agriculture policy.⁷

2. The Food and Agriculture Organization should initiate a process to create a Secretariat to implement this Convention. Representatives from food surplus and food deficit countries including farmers, NGOs, other members of civil society, and representatives from other major food-related agencies such as the UN Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Development Program should also play a major role in defining and implementing policy.

3. The Convention's implementation will be financed by member contributions and/or alternative financing mechanisms such as a .01 percent tax on agricultural commodity trade or the proposed Tobin tax on international financial transactions.

National Food Security Plans:

formerly required by GATT Article 11 (import controls when linked to domestic supply management programs) with the added requirement that the crop supplies under management be essential for food security.

⁶Drawing on the experience from international commodity agreements on such products as cacao and coffee, the Secretariat could work with staple food importing and exporting countries to develop reliable, stable supplies of staple foods for countries that are unable to fill domestic demand. Domestic demand also includes supplies for local and national reserves.

⁷Disputes involving any of the functions defined by the Convention, including conflicts with other international conventions and agreements, must be resolved in internationally recognized fora with equivalent authority to the WTO and not be restricted to the dispute settlement procedures of the WTO. The Secretariat would assist governments in challenges related to local, regional, or national food security planning and policy.

With the support of the Secretariat, local and national governments, with the full participation of civil society, will develop national food security plans. These could include:

- Definition and identification of domestic staple foods essential to food security.
- Annual domestic staple food consumption projections with accompanying national production goals and commitments. These projections should also include volumes to be set aside in local and national reserves.
- Implementation of domestic agriculture policies to support staple production for domestic consumption. These could include price supports for staple crops and exemption from mandatory import requirements. Countries could also implement import restrictions to ensure that staple food production not be threatened by export dumping.
- Implementation of policies which support diverse sustainable agriculture and livelihood systems of production. These include land tenure systems that would ensure adequate land and water resources for farmers; the guaranteed access, use, development and free exchange of genetic resources; and the protection of Farmers' Rights.⁸
- Intellectual property laws that would exclude plant varieties, seeds and other genetic materials from patenting. Privatization of plants or animals or parts thereof, through patents and intellectual property rights regimes and other forms of exclusion like trade only in registered varieties, should be prohibited.
- Support and incentives for on-farm conservation and development of biodiversity, and for research and extension programs designed by farmers to reflect their priorities.
- Risk management policies to minimize the risk to health and the environment that may occur in the production, processing, distribution, preparation, consumption and disposal of foods and food products, including those that are genetically engineered.

International Network of Local, National and Regional Reserves:

1. The Secretariat will work with governments, NGOs, farmers, and other members of civil society to develop plans to have a global network of local, national and regional reserves in place by the end of the next decade.
2. Food reserves will be built from the local level up. National food security plans could include plans for farmer- or community-managed reserves and should set targets for their development out of local production.⁹

⁸See *The International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources*, W/V623. United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization

⁹The question of reserves requires more research and dialogue. While it is a broadly shared objective, mechanisms must be developed and refined. Farmers' organizations and consumer groups play a key role

3. Cooperation within regions (such as West Africa, the Caribbean, North America) is fundamental to food security. The network of reserves would be structured such that regional networks of reserves would be the first sources of food aid in times of emergency.
4. Costs for food reserves will be shared. The first priority is to reassign food aid funds from exporting countries for use by food deficit countries in the creation of local and national reserves. These funds would be replaced by funds earned from the alternative tax financing mechanisms as these become available.
5. The Secretariat will develop mechanisms to ensure that reserves are not managed to the detriment of producers and consumers.

in the development and management of reserves. The Sustainable Food Security Convention, for example, could include programs to support agricultural and consumer cooperatives in the creation and management of reserves at the local level that could form part of the global reserve network.