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About IATP

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. IATP is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota with an office in Geneva.

Food reserves needed to respond to global food crisis, civil society groups say

UN meeting in Dublin should focus on addressing agriculture volatility and hunger

MINNEAPOLIS/DUBLIN – Civil society organizations today called on governments and United Nations bodies to honor previous commitments to explore the potential of food reserves to address hunger and stabilize agricultural markets. The letter, signed by 60 groups, was presented at a UN meeting being held in Dublin on May 17–18 on the global food crisis.

The civil society letter challenged global leaders to “take decisive action to address the structural causes of food insecurity and to prevent a repeat of recent food price spikes. Food reserves are a valuable tool in improving access and distribution of food. They can strengthen the ability of governments to limit excessive price volatility for both farmers and consumers.”

The Dublin meeting was convened by the United Nations High-Level Task Force for the Global Food Security Crisis. Participants, which include representatives from governments and civil society organizations, will discuss the task force’s Comprehensive Framework for Action.

“Rising rates of hunger, and the loss of rural livelihoods—particularly in developing countries—has highlighted the urgent need to act,” said the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy’s Sophia Murphy, who is attending the Dublin meeting and will co-chair the working group on trade. “Food reserves make sense: putting food aside when it’s abundant, to use later when the need is greater. Governments have expressed interest in reserves, indeed, most governments operate a reserve in some form or another. Now is the time to get reserves working the way they should to protect food security and promote resilient rural communities.”

During the High-Level Conference on World Food Security in 2008, then again at the World Food Summit in 2009, governments recognized the potential of stockholding to deal with humanitarian food emergencies and to limit price volatility, calling for a review of reserves. But that review has yet to take place. In March 2010, Brazil, Russia, India and China (the BRIC countries) also committed to helping countries establish national grain reserves.

In the letter, civil society groups requested that the UN High-Level Task Force conduct a comprehensive review of food reserves by allocating resources and setting a firm timetable for completing the review in 2010. Additionally, they called on individual governments to increase foreign and domestic investment to achieve culturally appropriate local and regional food security reserves; establish an international commission on reserves possibly coordinated by the FAO Committee on Food Security; support multilateral, regional and bilateral agricultural trade rules; and renegotiate the Food Aid Convention to include food security reserves.

The full civil society letter can be read at <http://www.iatp.org>.

Last year, IATP published “Strategic Grain Reserves in the Era of Volatility,” examining the potential role of reserves in stabilizing agriculture markets. IATP, Collectif Stratégies Alimentaires and Oxfam Solidarity will hold a civil society meeting in Brussels on food reserves on June 1–2. For more details see http://www.tradeobservatory.org/issue_foodSecurity.cfm.

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