

Dick Lugar

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Lugar to make recommendations on food security

U.S. Sen. Dick Lugar told the CSIS Task Force on Global Food Security that he will formulate recommendations to the President prior to the G8 Summit in July on policy changes that would improve rural agriculture and better respond to future food crises. In a statement to the task force today, Lugar outlined initial thoughts on possible recommendations and critical questions that need to be addressed:

I am pleased to serve as co-chairman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies Task Force on Global Food Security. It is a special pleasure to be joined in this endeavor by Senator Casey, who has made outstanding contributions to the work of the two committees on which I sit – the Agriculture Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee. I commend CSIS for this initiative to identify the causes and consequences of food insecurity and to put the best minds together to seek sustainable solutions.

The breadth and depth of today's food crisis is deeply troubling. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) estimates that people in nearly 40 countries are facing food shortages that require international intervention. More than a dozen countries have experienced food-related riots and social unrest. Many more countries are suffering from chronic food insecurity. That is, year in and year out, these countries have both food availability and access problems. In fifteen countries, 35 percent or more of the population is considered undernourished by the FAO. Another 23 countries have undernourished populations between 20 percent and 34 percent of their total. The undernourished comprise 850 million people globally, 170 million of which are children.

The current food crisis was produced by a complex web of factors: increased demand for food from growing populations in emerging economies; soaring energy prices that drive up costs all along the farm to market chain and increased demand for biofuels; droughts in some key food exporting countries; cutoffs in grain exports by major suppliers; market-distorting subsidies; and a tumbling U.S. dollar.

The Task Force has taken on the challenge of trying to disentangle this complex web and to make recommendations that, if implemented, would greatly improve the global capacity to reduce food insecurity and respond to food emergencies.

A comprehensive approach needs to address at least the following five questions:

First, how does the international community improve its ability to anticipate and respond in a coordinated and timely way to future emerging food supply problems?

Second, how do we achieve open trade in support of food security when the United States and Europe insist on maintaining farm subsidies, and when developing countries are resistant to dropping trade barriers?

Third, how do we achieve greater farm productivity through improved farming methods and the use of drought and disease resistant seed when agricultural assistance worldwide has declined and some parts of the world have an irrational aversion to genetically modified seed and crops?

Fourth, how do we decouple energy and agriculture issues so that both sectors benefit from scientific advances, and the debate progresses from one of fuel versus food, to fuel and food security?

Fifth, how do we make investments in human capital so that information is disseminated, technology is improved, and incomes are raised?

With these questions in mind, I plan to offer a set of initial recommendations to the President prior to the G8 Summit in July. The proposals I am examining include the following:

- Reconstituting the Food Aid Convention that expired in 2003 and raising its visibility to include a fuller range of coordination activities.
- Using the Convention to manage regionally placed supplies of food stocks in a manner similar to the international coordination of strategic petroleum stocks at the International Energy Agency.
- Establishing a mechanism that monitors our existing food shortage early warning systems and then coordinates an international response to prevent unfavorable conditions from deteriorating into crises.
- Doubling international assistance for agricultural productivity and rural development.
- Creating a global land-grant college network to advance scientific research, invest in human capital through educational opportunities, and provide extension services to small farmers.
- Shrinking farm subsidies to remove market distortions and promote an open trading system.
- Securing a strong statement of G-8 commitment to invest in research and large-scale commercial deployment of next generation biofuels made from non-food stocks.

I hope some of these ideas are useful to the Task Force. I invite you to produce recommendations that are bold and innovative. I look forward to your thoughts and comments on these ideas and our work together.

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