

Casey Allison, Student Participant
West Marshall High School
State Center, Iowa

Solving World Hunger

I'm a 16 year old junior at West Marshall High School in central Iowa. Prior to my research I knew very little about world hunger and the people who live in severe poverty. My life was filled with school, 4-H and FFA, church, family and day to day life; in my little rural community everybody is absorbed in small town life. We are so blessed with good jobs, nice houses, vehicles, etc. that we sometimes fail to remember there are people in the world who aren't so blessed or haven't been so lucky. After conducting my research I have come to appreciate what I have and have a better understanding for the need of a solution to world poverty and hunger. This is a global problem that gets worse every day and needs to be brought to more people's attention.

The definition of subsistence farming is: to produce enough to meet consumption needs with little or no surplus. The biggest problem these people face is stated directly in the definition of subsistence farming, **to produce only enough for consumption with little surplus**. This means subsistence farmers spend all their time producing **only** enough to meet the needs of their family, and there is no surplus for market. The most important thing these people can do is get past subsistence farming and produce surplus food for market. This will help the economy in multiple ways. It will allow a surplus of food to be produced, allowing certain people to leave the farm and specialize in a certain occupation. This will in turn stimulate the economy and should be a win, win situation for everyone. It will also allow the farmers to generate an income, so they can buy materials or perhaps invest their money in an investment maybe even open up their own business. The million dollar question is how we help them to get past subsistence farming and help the poor and impoverished improve their farming, lifestyle and quality of life.

I propose that we use university extensions to help these people improve their farming practices. Just ask around in rural farming communities in the Midwest; there are certain farmers that learn and improve their farming practices. They visit seminars, business management schools, do research and converse with other farmers. Farmers are always learning and expanding their knowledge to improve their yields, cut back on costs, and implement new farming practices to improve their profitability and productivity. On the other end of the spectrum there are those farmers who don't make an extra effort to learn more and aren't good farmers. They don't use new technology to keep accurate records and don't implement new and improved farming practices. People will keep on doing what they learned as a youth, keep using the same practices that his dad used and his dad farmed the same as his dad, because that is the only thing these people know or they are unwilling to change their ways. I think this is how farming is in poverty stricken countries. The people have been poor for many generations, meaning that for several generations their family didn't have the money to afford a proper education. So they just farmed the only way they knew how, the way they were taught by their family. The problem with this is that it never introduces new practices or new techniques. In a time when the need for food increases by the day these impoverished farmers are falling behind the world in terms of keeping up with the demand. Their farming practices are so poor they aren't productively farming; they are only producing enough to barely feed their families. The key to these people being better farmers is getting in tune with the rest of the world. What I mean by this is that if these people could simply improve their practices by using new technology it would increase their production dramatically. This would be a large step in the right direction to getting away from subsistence farming. When I say using new technology I don't mean large tractors and high tech farm

equipment. That wouldn't be a practical improvement. What the farmers need is someone to teach them. In my opinion the best way to do this would be through a university extension service. This would be an opportunity provided to anyone. I think the university extension should be used as a tool for the farmers to use. These people would be there to educate the farmers to use new ideas, new practices, new tools, etc. Experienced, smart, knowledgeable people should be put in the extension services to help teach these people what they need to know.

There are three important factors that affect the farmer's productivity.

1) Natural Resources: They depend on natural resources, animals, seed, water, and soil. The extension service could help farmers learn about water management to preserve water in dry times, or things like how deep to plant the seed, soil conditions that are best to plant in, or how tillage practices can keep weed control to a minimum. If the farmers could take a simple soil test they could figure out which crops would grow best in certain fields and plant those certain fields accordingly. It is small simple improvements like those I mentioned above that could improve their farming practices by a tenfold. These sometimes get overlooked but would have a large impact on farming productivity.

2) Capital Resources: This is a very important factor impacting farming. I'm sure some people have the great idea to help the poor by sending them large tractors and equipment to help them get their farming done fast and efficiently, but in all reality that is the worst possible way you could help the people. A large tractor or implement would not be a realistic solution to the problem, for many reasons. A tractor would be so big they wouldn't be able using it to farm because the fields are so small. It would be so clumsy and awkward that it would probably make more of a mess than really help at all. Plus, in the situation where the tractor would break, how would the farmers afford to pay to have it fixed? Or how would they get the parts? A better solution would be using smaller equipment like a roto tiller or something along those lines. A small engine machine like that would be much easier to fix, use less fuel, and is much easier to run. Granted the farmers wouldn't be able to go and by a field tiller by themselves, but if the extension program would rent out or lease one to area farmers I think it would really help the farmers be more productive. If the farmers had access to new or newer equipment that had small upgrades from their old equipment would really help the farmers do a better job farming.

3) Human Resources: the farmers are so impoverished that they probably had a very poor education if they were able to get one at all. My point is, more than likely the farmers lack the knowledge and skill to really do good job farming. They don't know any different and weren't taught any different. An extension service would provide these people with the opportunity to learn new techniques. They wouldn't even have to learn new techniques; it could just be everyday practices that are already used in the United States or world wide. They wouldn't have to completely change their practices just make simple modifications that would make a big difference. A few examples would be the use of terraces to prevent runoff and erosion, or the rotation of crops on different fields to prevent taking all the nutrients out of fields because they have been farmed the same way several years in a row. Basically, it is small simple practical changes like this that would be affordable and easy enough to implement.

The next big question is how would the extension services get set up in the first place? That is a good question. I propose that the government and universities work in unison to develop a team of experts from around the world or even educated people from universities to build a program where the farmers could come and learn. Now obviously the farmers are not going to be able to pay for these services. That's where the government plays a role in helping the farmers out. Possibly the government could grant each county or couple counties money to start a program like this. Another thing the government could do to help the farmers out is loan them money with a low percentage rate so they wouldn't have to go terribly deep in debt if they wanted to buy new tools or other things to improve their farming practices. Possibly the government could set up an incentive program that would reward farmers. If an incentive program was set up,

maybe the farmers would have to meet a set of criteria and, if they do, they get tools or seed or something useful on the farm.

These are just a few ideas to improve farming in poverty stricken countries. There are so many ways that these people could be helped, it's hard to cover everything. It's a problem that's not going to be solved overnight, but we have to keep pushing to find a solution and help these people as much as we can. It's so easy to forget how lucky we are that we lose sight of other's problems.

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