

Food Security Solutions



What solutions have the greatest potential for increasing food security? Cargill believes critical responses to food security challenges around the world include honoring comparative advantage by growing crops well suited to local conditions, enabling open markets, supporting smallholder farmers, fostering cooperation between the public and private sectors, encouraging investment, harmonizing food safety standards and reforming biofuels mandates. While focusing on long-term solutions is crucial for achieving food security, providing aid during emergency food shortages is critical as well.

Increasing production and access to food

The world will always raise the most food the most economically and in the most environmentally responsible way when farmers plant the right crops for their local climate and soils using the right technology, then trade with others for the benefit of all. If every country set a goal of food self-sufficiency, the world would have much less food. Open markets increase food security by ensuring food surpluses can reach areas of deficit. Governments need to support open markets through a fair, transparent and rules-based trading system. Trade helps create jobs, supports local economies, helps raise living standards and contributes to a more food secure global population.

To increase food security, the world needs farmers at every level of production to be successful. Providing support to smallholder farmers is essential to helping them fulfill their expanding role in feeding the hungry and fighting malnutrition. First, smallholder farmers need training in agricultural best practices and access to inputs, credit, storage and technology to increase their productivity in a sustainable way, which raises their own living standards and produces surpluses to help nourish others. Second, farmers need some form of revenue certainty. Smallholder farmers often are forced to sell at harvest when they are cash flow destitute and have limited access to real credit. Selling at depressed prices creates a cycle of discouraging further production in future years. Farmers in developing countries need reliable markets into which to sell their crops each season and an adequate price to compensate them for their efforts and provide incentive to continue production the following year. Third, farmers need access to crop insurance and other risk management tools so they can rebound from crop failures or other growing season fluctuations. And fourth, farmers must be able to own their land and pledge it as collateral if they are expected to reinvest and raise their productivity over time.

Improvements in African agriculture will be necessary to feed the world's growing population. Roughly 60 percent of the world's potential cropland is in Africa, and much of that land has adequate sun, water and soil for rain-fed crop production. Despite its vast potential, Africa has the lowest agricultural productivity in the world and must import much of the food and agricultural products its people need. Increasing Africa's agricultural production – including closing the productivity gap by supporting smallholder farmers and bringing suitable lands into production – will be essential for achieving food security across Africa and around the world.

Technology advances have increased the efficiency of the global food system, giving more people access to a wider range of safe, nutritious foods at a relatively low cost. Genetic improvements, such as drought resistance, and optimization of inputs, such as fertilizer, help farmers improve yields while reducing waste and environmental impact. Science and technology are vital to producing more safe, affordable and nutritious food in an environmentally conscious way. High-yield agriculture allows farmers to grow more food so less land needs to be converted for production. Small- and large-scale farmers using a variety of production practices will be needed to feed a growing world.

Farmers benefit from cooperation between the public and private sectors, enabling them to grow more food sustainably and making that food accessible to others. Civil society, governments, academia and the private sector must work together toward solutions, such as training farmers in sustainable practices, helping them invest cooperatively in storage and other infrastructure, and facilitating harvest loans.

Greater investment in agriculture by the public and private sectors also is necessary to increase global food production. A boost in funding and attention in the following key areas is needed: transportation, distribution, storage and energy infrastructure; agricultural research and development; agricultural science, extension, education and the promotion of best practices; and governance around legal and business structures to encourage private sector investment.

Focusing on the role of women farmers also is critical to achieving food security. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), women account for nearly half – 43 percent – of the world's farmers, although their contribution to the agricultural labor force can be much higher – more than 60 percent in some countries. Yet women farmers face more severe constraints than men in accessing productive resources, markets and services. Closing the gender gap in agriculture would produce significant gains for society by increasing agricultural productivity, reducing poverty and hunger and promoting economic growth. Aid for agricultural development programs needs to more closely match the significant role women play in agricultural production.

Removing barriers

Ensuring the safety of food as it is produced and transported also is critical to achieving greater food security. To move food efficiently from where it is produced to where it is needed, predictable, science-based global food safety standards are necessary to manage risk, provide transparency and ensure accountability. Harmonizing standards can help address the problem of food waste and correct the lapses, failures and gaps in food safety systems that prevent food from being safely consumed.

Reform of biofuels mandates also is necessary to help improve food security. Demand for biofuels has spurred investment in agriculture, but mandated use of biofuels creates inelastic demand and increased volatility in the food system. To help balance food, animal feed and biofuel uses of agricultural feedstocks, government policy needs to include waivers or other trigger mechanisms to lift biofuels mandates in times of stress, so that the market can direct short crops to those sectors where they are most needed.

Improving nutrition

Malnutrition imposes health, social and economic burdens on individuals, communities, businesses and governments. Increasing collaboration by the public, private and nonprofit sectors is needed to ensure people receive adequate nutrition. The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Business Network and Global Nutrition for Growth Compact are helping focus attention and action to improve nutrition. Undernutrition increasingly co-exists with obesity, which is rising in every part of the world. Nutrition solutions are needed that improve diet and health for people across the food security spectrum, including hunger and overconsumption.

Providing emergency food aid

In cases of emergency food shortages – due to weather-related production shortfalls, natural disasters, political instability or conflict – or where markets work counter to food security for a period of time, mechanisms and programs for consumers and farmers are needed to support food security. Consumers can often be helped through income safety nets that tackle basic poverty, or more focused initiatives such as food banks and other emergency feeding programs, school feeding programs, or food voucher systems that can ensure that people have enough to eat. Farmers can be helped through crop insurance and programs that guarantee inputs for the following year. In times of dire emergency, support is needed for the World Food Programme to have flexibility in acquiring emergency food supplies.

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