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food and people

American food aid

Who gets it, how much is there, and what good does it all do?

This is the 14th in a series of 15 articles exploring "Food and People." In this article, Frances Moore Lappe, co-founder of the nonprofit Institute for Food and Development Policy, and her co-author argue that American food aid is failing to reach the hungriest people in the world. This series was written for Courses by Newspaper, a program of University Extension, University of California, San Diego, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Copyright 1982 by the Regents of the University of California.

By Frances Moore Lappe, Nick Allen and David Kinley special writers

IN THE LAST 25 years, the United States has distributed over \$30 billion worth of food aid to poor countries. Yet very little of this food has reached the hungriest people in the city slums and rural villages of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Why doesn't our food aid reach — let alone really help — these hungry people? Because, despite the genuine humanitarian intentions of most Americans, feeding the hungry has never been the primary purpose of U.S. food aid.

From its inception in 1954, the food aid program, dubbed Food for Peace, was designed to dispose of U.S. farm surpluses, to create new markets for American farmers and food processors, and above all, to support governments considered vital to U.S. national security.

While U.S. food aid had been distributed to over 130 countries, those considered strategic to American security have always been favored: Israel and Turkey during the 1950s, South Vietnam and Cambodia during the Vietnam War, and South Korea, Taiwan and Pakistan through most of food aid's history. As a recent General Accounting Office (GAO) study concluded, "PL 480 (food aid) allocation is based on foreign policy considerations and the importance of food as a determinant of political stability."

Even today, after numerous "reforms" in the program to assure that a larger portion of food aid was sent to the poorer nations, the majority of U.S. food aid goes to just a few countries — not necessarily the hungriest, but the most important to our foreign policy. Thus the Egyptian government, which has already been threatened with riots because of the high cost of food, alone receives 20 percent of total U.S. food aid.

TITLE I: FOOD FOR SALE

This food aid, however, seldom reaches the people who need it most. Under Title I of the Food for Peace program, more than half our food aid is sold — not given away — under long-term, low-interest loans to governments, which are then free to dispose of the food any way

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they choose. Most governments choose to sell it on the open market. But the hungry are precisely the ones who do not have the money to buy on this market. In Bangladesh, third largest recipient of U.S. food aid, the food is sold through a ration system to the people whose support the government needs most — civil servants, the police, the military, the urban middle class. "A permanent dole for the relatively wealthy" is how the Wall Street Journal recently described it. Furthermore, because the food is often sold in recipient nations for less than local farmers could produce it for, food aid helps to drive them out of business. "Lentil production could be stimulated by higher producer prices," the GAO reported recently. "Yet Egyptian farmers receive less than one-third the price paid for imported lentils."

In addition, the availability of food aid means that governments have little incentive to improve farm production or enact genuine land reform.

TITLE II: DIRECT ASSISTANCE

The other major component of our food aid, Title II, goes largely to private voluntary organizations such as CARE and Catholic Relief Services, which use it for Food for Work, direct feeding and "community development."

Food for Work, intended to get food directly to hungry people in exchange for their labor on roads, canals and other construction projects, sounds great in Washington. But it hasn't worked so well in the field.

Why? First, improvements to the land, such as canals and soil conservation projects, benefit primarily landowners; they do little for the landless or those whose meager plots cannot support them more than half the population in countries such as Bangladesh. With their financial gains from Food for Work projects, landowners can often buy up even more land from debt-ridden small farmers, pushing them into an even worse position.

Second, landowners and government officials often "divert" much of the food for their own uses. In Bangladesh, for example, 30 percent of the Food for Work wheat never



reaches the laborers, according to Hjalmar Brundin, a consultant to the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID).

Third, peasants working on Food for Work projects often do not have enough additional time to work on the small plots of land some of them are able to own or rent. As a confidential AID report explains, the Food for Work program strengthens "an exploitative semi-feudal system" in the villages and "speeds up the polarization process in the rural areas."

Thus, in Bangladesh, as in Egypt, El Salvador, Haiti and other countries, our food aid strengthens elitist governments and unjust, underproductive land ownership systems in three ways.

Cheap food helps "buy off" the urban middle classes and security forces. Cash from the food sales provides general budgetary support which governments can use as they please. And Food for Work projects increase the power of the large rural landlords over the landless and near-landless in the countryside.

Most Third World countries already produce enough food to feed their people, if it were fairly distributed. The problem is that the majority of the population has neither enough land to grow food on nor jobs providing enough income to buy food. The warehouses "may be full of rice," as an AID official in Bangladesh recently pointed

out, "but that doesn't mean that most people can afford to buy enough to meet their needs."

Our food aid can be helpful rather than harmful in emergencies when adequate food is not available within a country. It can also be helpful when offered to governments, such as Nicaragua, engaged in genuine redistribution of control over food-producing resources. But because this redistribution often threatens the power of U.S.-backed interests in the Third World, these are among the governments least likely to receive food aid under the Reagan administration.

In the long run, the only real solution to world hunger is the fair sharing of control over food-producing resources such as land, water and credit.

The views expressed in Courses by Newspaper are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the University of California, the National Endowment for the Humanities or the participating newspapers and colleges.

Next week: Dudley Kirk, professor of demography in Stanford University's Food Research Institute, makes some predictions about the outcome of the race between population growth and food production.

World's fare: a sampling of international foods

ORIENTAL CHICKEN SALAD

- 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- 1 bunch watercress
- 1 cucumber
- 1 red pepper, cut into thin strips
- 1 cup sliced mushrooms
- 1/2 cup chopped salted peanuts
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon chopped scallions
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sherry
- 2 teaspoons peanut oil
- 3 teaspoons dry mustard
- 1-1/2 teaspoons sugar

Place chicken in center of large platter. Surround chicken with watercress. Slice cucumber in half lengthwise. Scoop out seeds. Slice cucumber into 1/4-inch thick slices. Arrange cucumber, red pepper and mushrooms around chicken. Sprinkle peanuts on top of chicken. In a small bowl, stir together soy sauce, scallions, vinegar, sherry, oil, mustard and sugar; mix well. Pour over salad. Makes 4 servings.

INDIAN SATE

- 1/2 cup creamy peanut butter
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1/4 cup chopped parsley
- 1/4 cup minced onion
- 4 teaspoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2 chicken breasts, boned, skinned and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 red peppers, cut into 1-inch pieces

In food processor bowl or blender container, stir together peanut butter, lemon juice, parsley, onion, soy sauce, ginger and red pepper flakes; process until well mixed. Thread chicken and red pepper pieces alternately onto bamboo skewers or toothpicks. Brush with peanut butter mixture. Broil 15 minutes or until chicken is fork tender. Makes 12 appetizer servings.

MEXICAN PORK WITH PEANUT SAUCE

- 1-1/4 cups unsalted peanuts, very finely ground
- 2 medium tomatoes, seeded and chopped
- 1/3 cup chopped onion
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 1 can (4 oz.) green chilies, seeded and chopped
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 pound cooked pork, sliced
- 10 flour tortillas

In food processor bowl or blender container, stir together peanuts, tomatoes, onion, garlic, chilies, coriander, cumin and salt. Blend until thoroughly mixed. Add peanut mixture, water and pork to a large skillet. Heat over medium heat, stirring occasionally for 15 minutes. Wrap tortillas in a damp cloth towel. Heat in a 325° F. oven for 15 minutes. Place pork mixture in center of each tortilla. Roll up. If desired, garnish with tomato wedges and avocado slices. Makes 5-6 servings.

PERUVIAN BEANS

- 1 tablespoon peanut oil
- 1 egg white
- 3/4 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 1 pound unsalted peanuts

Grease a 15-1/2 x 10-1/2 x 1-inch jelly roll pan with peanut oil. Beat egg white until foamy. Fold in hot pepper sauce, garlic powder, paprika and seasoned salt. Add peanuts, stir to coat evenly. Spread in pan. Bake in a 250° F. oven for 45 minutes. Remove from oven. Break up any large pieces. Store in an airtight container. Makes 1 pound.

PEANUT BUTTER ICE CREAM

- 2 eggs
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 cup chunky peanut butter
- 1/2 cup light corn syrup
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla

In a medium bowl, beat eggs until frothy. Gradually beat in sugar until dissolved. Add peanut butter and corn syrup; beat until well blended. Stir in cream, milk and vanilla. Add the peanut butter mixture to can of ice cream maker. Follow manufacturer's instructions for making ice cream. Freeze until firm. Makes 2 quarts.