

HUNGER

David L. Bender, *Publisher*
Bruno Leone, *Executive Editor*

Katie de Koster, *Managing Editor*
Scott Barbour, *Senior Editor*

Scott Barbour, *Book Editor*
William Dudley, *Assistant Editor*



No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means, electrical, mechanical, or otherwise, including, but not limited to, photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Cover photo: SABA: Haviv

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hunger / Scott Barbour, book editor, William Dudley, assistant editor.

p. cm. — (Current controversies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-56510-239-8 (lib. : alk. paper) — ISBN 1-56510-238-X
(pbk. : alk. paper.)

1. Food supply. 2. Food relief. [1. Hunger. 2. Food supply. 3. Food relief.] I. Barbour, Scott, 1963- . II. Dudley, William, 1964- .

III. Series.

HD9000.5.H814 1995

363.8—dc20

94-43376

CIP

AC

© 1995 by Greenhaven Press, Inc., PO Box 289009, San Diego, CA 92198-9009

Printed in the U.S.A.

Every effort has been made to trace the owners of copyrighted material.

Contents

Foreword	10
Introduction	12
Chapter 1: What Are the Causes of Hunger?	
Hunger in the World: An Overview <i>by Robin Wright</i>	16
Nearly one out of six people in the world suffers from acute or chronic hunger. Population growth, wars, debt crises, ethnic conflict, misuse of natural resources, and other factors have caused setbacks in the struggle to end world hunger.	
The Causes of Hunger Are Related to Population and the Environment	
Overpopulation Causes Hunger <i>by Robert S. McNamara</i>	21
The world's population is growing at an explosive rate and may soon outpace the earth's capacity to provide enough food for all. Hunger, especially in poorer regions, may become more common.	
Overpopulation Has Caused Hunger in Africa <i>by Fred Sai</i>	27
Increasing population densities in many African countries create overcrowding, land shortages, and hunger. African nations should take steps to slow population growth.	
Environmental Limits on World Food Production Can Lead to Hunger <i>by Lester R. Brown</i>	31
Growth in world food production has slowed since 1984 as the limits of current agricultural technology have been reached and environmental degradation has affected farming. Humanity needs to stabilize population and consumption if it is to avoid widespread hunger in the near future.	
Desertification Contributes to World Hunger <i>by Michael Glantz</i>	40
Desertification refers to the process by which formerly productive lands become barren because of environmental pollution and climate change. Growing desertification in many parts of the world, especially sub-Saharan Africa, reduces food supplies and contributes to hunger.	
The Causes of Hunger Are Political and Economic	
Hunger Is Not Caused by Overpopulation <i>by Sheldon Richman</i>	42
The widely held belief that the world has too many people is a myth. The earth is capable of growing enough food for billions more people than currently exist. Famines are caused by flawed economic and political systems, civil wars, and natural disasters—not by overpopulation.	

The Policies of Northern Nations Contribute to Famine in Africa <i>by John Prendergast and Terence Miller</i>	48
The roots of the food crisis in Africa lie in the past policies of European colonialists and the present-day policies of developed nations—including the United States—that retard African economic development.	
Wars Are the Primary Cause of Famine <i>by Robert W. Kates</i>	54
While historically famines have had many different causes, the primary cause of famine today is war between and within nations. New rules of international humanitarian intervention should be developed to ensure the provision of relief in zones of conflict.	
Genocidal Governments Create Famine <i>by Kurt Jonassohn</i>	59
Technological advances in food production and storage should have made famines a thing of the past. Famines today are the result of deliberate decisions by governments to commit genocide against victimized populations.	
World Bank Policies Contribute to World Hunger <i>by Atherton Martin</i>	67
The development strategies supported and fostered by the World Bank and other international financial institutions are a chief cause of world hunger. In its dealings with developing nations, the World Bank should place greater emphasis on relieving hunger and promoting human welfare.	
Desertification Is Not a Serious Threat <i>by William K. Stevens</i>	72
Scientists have discovered evidence that so-called desertification—the expansion of deserts to the detriment of adjacent pastures and croplands—is not occurring as was previously believed. Although some degradation of drylands is taking place, it is mostly caused by lack of rain rather than human activity, and degraded lands often recover when rain returns.	

Chapter 2: Is Hunger a Serious Problem in the United States?

Chapter Preface	78
Yes: Hunger Is a Serious Problem in the United States	
Hunger Is a Serious Problem in the United States <i>by Laura Shapiro</i>	79
Due to widespread unemployment and underemployment, one out of ten Americans use food pantries, soup kitchens, and other food relief programs. Increased government funding for food programs could help end hunger and its detrimental effects on children.	
Hunger Is a Serious Problem Among Minorities <i>by Victor Perlo</i>	83
Racial discrimination in American society results in widespread poverty, hunger, and homelessness among minorities—especially African Americans. The suffering of oppressed citizens must be opposed through unified action and adequate social programs.	
Hunger Is a Serious Problem Among the Elderly <i>by Michael J. McCarthy</i>	89
Funding for food programs for the elderly has not kept pace with the rise	

in food prices and the growth of the elderly population. Consequently, millions of older Americans are hungry or malnourished.

No: Hunger Is Not a Serious Problem in the United States

Hunger Is Not a Problem in the United States *by Robert Rector* 95

Contrary to claims in the media, government surveys reveal that poor Americans do not suffer from hunger-induced malnutrition. Both poor and high-income children receive above-adequate levels of protein and most vitamins and minerals.

The Seriousness of Hunger in Rural Areas Is Exaggerated 104

by Dan McMurry

A 1986 report by the Harvard Physician Task Force on Hunger lists 150 counties that it claims have the worst hunger problems in the United States. Because the report relies on an inadequate definition of hunger (based on statistics of poverty levels and food stamp participation), its finding of widespread rural hunger is invalid.

Chapter 3: Can Technological Advances Increase Food Production?

Technology and Food Production: An Overview *by Scott Pendleton* 113

World food production must triple within fifty years to keep up with projected population growth. Some forecasters predict that political turmoil, environmental degradation, and a lack of new technologies will threaten agricultural productivity. Others insist that technology and economic incentives can keep crop yields rising.

Yes: Technological Advances Can Increase Food Production

Technological Progress Increases Food Production 118

by Indur M. Goklany and Merritt W. Sprague

Technologies advanced since the early 1900s—including the internal combustion engine, refrigeration, and chemical fertilizers and pesticides—have enabled the United States to produce sufficient food for domestic use and for export while conserving natural habitats. To meet the demands of a growing world population, technological progress must continue.

Technology and Market Forces Can Increase Food Production 126

by Frances Cairncross

In coming years, population growth will demand higher crop yields in developing countries. New agricultural technologies, driven by market incentives, can ensure the adequate production of food. However, government intervention is needed to prevent environmental degradation.

Modern Agricultural Practices Are Beneficial *by Dennis T. Avery* 132

High-yield farming—the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers and seeds that produce large yields—is capable of providing abundant food for the earth's current and future populations. It also preserves the environment by enabling farmers to produce large amounts of food on relatively small areas of land, obviating the need to convert natural habitats to farmland.

Biotechnology Can Enhance Food Production *by Laurent Belsie* 140

While immediate results will be modest, genetic engineering of plants

and animals may boost food production significantly in the near future. Advances in the bioengineering of grain will be necessary to meet the world's increasing food demands.

No: Technological Advances May Not Increase Food Production

Modern Agricultural Methods Threaten the Food Supply 145

by Eugene Linden

Since the mid-1980s, the progress in food production that began in the 1960s has slowed dramatically. Farmers seeking high yields increasingly rely on genetically similar seeds, which has resulted in an overall decline of biodiversity. This loss of diversity increases the vulnerability of crops to pests, diseases, and droughts, and therefore threatens the world's food supply.

Modern Agricultural Practices Are Destructive *by E.G. Vallianatos* 150

American agriculture is increasingly dominated by large corporations employing modern technologies that are inefficient and harmful to the environment and to humans—especially people of color and the poor. Traditional techniques originating in Third World countries are more productive and less dangerous than those of American “agribusiness.”

The Industrial Food Production System Harms Poor Nations 157

by Gary Kline

The U.S. industrial, free-market system of food production and distribution is being expanded to the Third World. This system perpetuates poverty and hunger in poor countries because it concentrates land in the hands of relatively few owners, directs food to the affluent instead of the needy, and encourages the production of crops for the market rather than basic food crops.

Biotechnology Is Dangerous *by Liebe F. Cavalieri* 165

Genetic engineering technologies intended to control pests and weeds pose a variety of risks to humans and the environment—and they will not solve the problem of world hunger. Rather than relying on chemicals and genetic engineering, farmers should pursue sustainable agriculture through alternative farming practices.

Chapter 4: How Can Hunger and Famine Be Reduced?

Reducing Hunger and Famine: An Overview *by Robert S. Chen* 173

There is room for both pessimism and optimism about the future of hunger. Regional conflicts, population pressures, and economic instability may result in increased chronic hunger and famine. On the other hand, increases in food production, improved social safety nets, and restructured societies and economies may provide greater food security in the future.

U.S. Aid for Development Can Reduce Hunger *by Sharon Pauling* 180

U.S. foreign aid during the Cold War was subordinated to political, military, and economic interests, while current efforts are being undermined by budget constraints. Funding for aid should be increased, and aid should be geared toward promoting self-reliance and sustainable development in developing countries.

A Wide Variety of Foreign Aid Can Reduce Hunger <i>by Cynthia P. Green</i>	186
Population growth and environmentally destructive agricultural practices are straining the earth's capacity to feed its people. The United States should provide developing countries with various types of foreign aid—including family planning services, technology transfer, and education—to head off future famines.	
Food Aid Programs Do Not Reduce Hunger <i>by Tom Bethell</i>	192
Food aid sent by the United States and other developed nations to Africa and other regions undermines local agriculture, resulting in famines in times of bad weather.	
Empowering Poor Women Can End Chronic Hunger <i>by Freedom from Hunger</i>	197
Chronic hunger prevents much of the world's population from participating in any human endeavor beyond the struggle to survive. Providing resources and information to cultivate self-help among the poor—especially among poor women—is the key to ending chronic hunger.	
Humanitarian Intervention Can Relieve Famine <i>by Tony P. Hall</i>	201
International interventions should be based on the concept of a universal right to food. A United Nations “humanitarian strike force” should be created to provide famine relief in countries experiencing humanitarian disasters, including those caused by civil and ethnic conflicts.	
Poor Countries Should Implement Famine-Prevention Systems <i>by Alex de Waal</i>	204
Food aid often fails to reach the needy because corrupt governments sell it for profit and because civil conflicts prevent its distribution. To prevent these problems, countries receiving aid should be required to institute famine-prevention systems with adequate oversight.	
Democracy Prevents Famine <i>by Sylvia Nasar</i>	207
Contemporary famines are not caused by food shortages but by economic factors and ineffective government policies—especially those of authoritarian regimes. Famine does not occur in the presence of a stable, democratic government and a free press.	
Satellite Technology Can Help Prevent Famine <i>by Fabrizio del Piero</i>	210
The United Nations is working with American and European space agencies to collect data on global climate and vegetation patterns and distribute it to developing countries. This information can help these nations foresee and prevent famines resulting from drought, excessive rain, and pest infestations.	
Bibliography	213
Organizations to Contact	216
Index	219

Desertification Contributes to World Hunger

by **Michael Glantz**

About the author: *Michael Glantz is a senior scientist for the National Center for Atmospheric Research and directs the center's Environmental and Societal Impacts Group.*

Desertification can be defined as the creation of desert-like conditions where none had existed in the recent past. Although the concept has become most closely associated with arid areas along desert fringes, it is now applied to high rainfall areas like the Amazon rainforest. Desertification is a mega-concept. It encompasses many processes such as wind and water erosion, soil salinization, overgrazing, waterlogging and deforestation. It also has competing definitions, of which there are more than a hundred. This perspective sees desertification as a process of change, rather than just the end result of that change.

The Human Factor

Desertification has a natural as well as a human component. In the ancient past its occurrence was dependent on land-climate interactions. In the past several thousand years the equation has been expanded to include humans. Today, desertification is dependent on land-climate-human interactions. Desertification in specific regions is occurring over decades and years instead of centuries and millennia. The difference is the human factor. We have not learned to live in harmony with our natural environment.

Many Americans believe desertification is a third world problem and not one we need be concerned about in North America. Yet aspects of desertification are under way in our country: degraded rangelands, major dust storms, decreasing soil fertility. Do we have a federal office of desertification control? No. Do we have a Bureau that deals with soil erosion? Yes. With grazing practices? Yes. While it appears that we are not doing much in North America to combat desertification (the mega-concept), we are quite active in combating

Michael Glantz, "Desertification," *Buzzworm*, January/February 1991. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Hunger

those land-use problems that degrade our soil's productivity.

In North America desertification is an economic problem. It is a different situation, however, in the third world where the inability to cope with aspects of desertification that encroach on agricultural fields, rangelands and on human settlements can mean the difference between life and death. Many people in sub-Saharan Africa live from one season to the next. They are on their own when it comes to survival, as their governments are either unwilling or unable to assist them. When the fertility of their soils declines, bringing down food production with it, they become malnourished, finding it even more difficult to work their fields. Ultimately they must abandon their land in search of land not yet degraded by human activities.

“The inability to cope with aspects of desertification . . . can mean the difference between life and death.”

Decades ago when population densities were lower, farmers could migrate to new areas, leaving their farmland fallow. Over time, the fields would recover and in a decade or two the farmers would rotate their farming back to the original site. With most of the arable land already in production, there is no possibility of letting the land lie fallow. Making a bad situation worse, animal manure is often collected in the fields to be used as fuel, eliminating a sorely needed source of fertilizer.

Poor countries do not have the funds to combat desertification. Industrialized countries apparently do not have the desire to address the sources of desertification in the third world in a major way. Lip service to combating desertification will not do the job. Training programs and technique transfer (as opposed to technology transfer) are necessary aspects of arresting desertification processes. It is far cheaper to train people to avert desertification than to reclaim land that has already been desertified.

A Long-Term Problem

Desertification is a long-term, low-grade, but cumulative environmental problem that, like air pollution, acid rain and global warming, keeps getting put on the back burner while governments address seemingly more pressing issues. Solutions, however, are often known but not applied for lack of appropriate funding. It will take lots of money to combat it. But those funds will have to be used more wisely in the future than they have been in the past. Education and training at the local level should be the highest priorities for agencies seeking to bring an end to desertification in those countries whose inhabitants are most threatened by the process.

Desertification deserves at least equal attention as other environmental changes that threaten “our plundered planet.” Only time will tell if humans are smart enough to give it that attention.