

**International Agricultural Development:  
A Critical Priority in the Fight Against  
Under-nutrition and HIV/AIDS**

**Private Sector Perspective**

**Rob Horsch  
Vice President, Product and Technology Cooperation  
Monsanto Company**

Through the United Nations, the countries of the world established the Millennium Development Goals, one of which is to cut hunger in half by 2015. As a member of the hunger task force, I saw first hand the connections between hunger, under-nutrition, poverty and HIV/AIDS -- affirming the conclusions of the discussion paper prepared for this conference.

Hunger and poverty are both contributors to and consequences of AIDS. Malnourished people are more susceptible to the scourges of AIDS and less able to benefit from treatments. And those suffering from AIDS, or those orphaned by it, or those who are caring for the sick, are less able to earn an income or grow the food they need to stay healthy. This creates a vicious cycle that must be attacked on both fronts: dealing with AIDS prevention and treatment and dealing with hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

The interconnections of agriculture, nutrition, poverty and health are well known to the task forces looking at the millennium goals. For example, the hunger task force will deal with rural poverty – since agricultural productivity is the prime tool for rural poverty reduction, as well increasing food supply. In addition, the task force notes that improvements in agricultural productivity are important for non-farm poor as well – since it leads to lower real costs for food and creates a cascade of off-farm economic growth.

The hunger task force has identified three major areas of intervention:

- Delivering tools for agricultural productivity, especially tools for soil fertility, water management, quality seeds and germplasm and pest control;
- Direct nutritional assistance for the hungry and malnourished – particularly the most at risk groups of mothers and children and the sick; and
- Developing rural infrastructure and markets that serve the poor – including for agriculture.

I can already tell you that the conclusion of the task force on hunger will say that it is possible and practical to meet this goal at an affordable cost. But it will require several times the relatively meager amount of humanitarian assistance and agricultural development assistance that we give to developing countries today. The new priority on agriculture at the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Millennium Challenge Account are good starts – but more will be needed.

**The private sector** is perhaps the broadest sector of all – ranging from farmers to input suppliers to dealers to transporters to processors to retailers to consumers. Let me give a few examples of the many different ways the private sector can and is helping with agricultural development and nutrition in countries where HIV/AIDS is a cause as well as an effect of hunger and malnutrition.

I want to acknowledge the leadership and generosity of growers in the United States. US growers are among the first to try new technologies, have a track record of continuous improvement in productivity and stewardship, and to consistently show a willingness to share their knowledge and experience with farmers from less developed countries. Also, from their bounty, comes the opportunity for helping the hungry and people with special dietary needs.

One example from US growers is the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH) - a program of the American Soybean Association to deliver soy-based high protein food supplements that can be added to locally grown staples to give a more balanced diet, especially for those with special needs. Adequate nutrition is important for effective treatment of AIDS. Different fractions of the soy meal can be separated and used for different purposes. WISHH and ACIDI/VOCA and others are exploring the potential role for soy concentrates as dietary supplements for HIV/AIDS sufferers.

This brings me to a key point: **U.S. leadership in science, technology and agricultural is of value to us – and to the rest of world as well.** Our schools, our scientists, our growers, our companies lead the world in discovering, adapting and implementing new and better agricultural technologies from which the rest of the world benefits. We must continue our leadership – for our own benefit and for everyone else's as well.

My own company is working to improve agricultural productivity and value in both the U.S. and developing countries. We are focused on three areas – weed control and no-till technology, quality seeds and breeding, and biotechnology. What we invent for the U.S. has turned out to be relevant and valuable in developing countries as well – as long as it is adapted to local varieties and local practices with local partners. We use three complementary, parallel strategies to deliver needed technology to smallholders in developing countries:

- Commercial markets;
- Development partnerships; and
- Technology sharing.

## **Commercial markets**

This past year, Monsanto products reached and directly benefited more than 25 million smallholder farmers in developing countries. These were customers – able to buy our products in a competitive marketplace.

A few examples of the benefits from useful commercial products and competitive markets coupled with policies that work:

- 1) Mexico - hybrid corn
- 2) South Africa - Bt corn and Bt cotton
- 3) Philippines - Bt corn
- 4) India & China - Bt cotton
- 5) Conservation tillage systems with glyphosate herbicide - around the world

## **Development Partnerships**

There are also smallholders who could benefit from our products today, but who live in areas where there is no functioning market to make products, credit and extension services available. Here we engage in development partnerships with non-profit organizations like SG2000, Winrock & Technoserve to locally test, locally adapt and locally deliver products to small-holders who otherwise would not have access.

Development partnerships examples:

- 1) Bt cotton and Bt corn in South Africa
- 2) Hybrid corn in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Ghana with SG2000
- 3) No-till in rice, cotton & corn in Western Africa with Winrock International
- 4) Mexico hybrid corn & no-till with FMDR

## **Technology Sharing**

We recognize that many smallholders have agricultural problems we are not working to solve – especially in the subsistence crops like cassava, sweet potatoes or cowpea. For such subsistence crops we share technology with public institutions whose role is to invest in creating public goods to solve those problems.

Public/private partnership examples include:

- 1) Golden rice – with enhanced beta carotene for vitamin A deficiency;
- 2) Golden hearted white maize – for other geographies, esp. in Africa;
- 3) Virus resistant cassava and sweetpotato and other subsistence crops;
- 4) Insect resistant cowpea and sweetpotato; and
- 5) Finishing the rice genome sequence 6 years ahead of schedule.

Investment in agricultural development is one of the most important keys to reducing hunger, poverty and under nutrition-related sicknesses. We all have a role to play. The private sector can play a major role in a variety of ways illustrated above. But the public sector must play a stronger role than it has in the past – in both leadership and funding to reach the many millions of poor, hungry and sick that the private sector alone will not reach in any reasonable timeframe.