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It is certainly a pleasure to be with you today as you discuss the important role of agriculture and proper nutrition in addressing the serious problem of HIV/AIDS in the developing world. I am pleased to have a few minutes to talk to you about these important issues.

I would like to begin by welcoming you to Washington. I wish you all the best as you open this forum. You have certainly assembled an impressive list of speakers.

Of course, I know we have a very knowledgeable group of participants in this room for the forum. This distinguished gathering provides the right combination of experience and expertise for a broad-based examination of these critical issues. Quite simply, you are people coming from organizations that can and do make a difference for the better in so many ways. In this instance, thank you for your interest and commitment to improving nutrition and agricultural development and relieving poverty and disease throughout the world.

As a Nebraskan, you can be assured that I certainly understand first-hand that we must look beyond our borders when we consider our agriculture policy. Ag trade and food aid are important not only for humanitarian purposes, but also for assisting farmers across the U.S. Since domestic demand generally remains stable, one of the keys to helping American farmers is to increase the amount of food sent to other countries.

I am pleased that you are now focusing attention on the essential role of agriculture and nutrition in addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS in the developing world. We all know that HIV/AIDS is a pandemic impacting millions of lives. The United States is working to provide prevention and treatment assistance to countries impacted by this disease. However, we have now learned through numerous studies that proper nutrition is needed to protect the immune system, help process medications, and extend the lives of those living with HIV/AIDS.

As I'm sure you'll hear this afternoon, graphically, HIV/AIDS is a devastating disease that is often a death sentence in developing countries, with the capacity to rip through a community, leaving orphans and splintered families in its wake. This pandemic also adversely affects agricultural development, governmental stability, and even regional and international security.

It is estimated that about 95 percent of those individuals with HIV/AIDS are in developing countries. As you well know, sub-Saharan Africa has been particularly hard hit by this horrible disease. However, it's also an increasingly serious problem in Asia, the Caribbean, Central America, and other parts of the world.

The implications for agriculture are obvious and direct. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization has estimated that since 1985, more than seven million farmers have died of AIDS in the 27 most severely affected countries. According to the FAO, food consumption in Africa drops by 40 percent in households affected by AIDS.

As this example makes clear, HIV/AIDS affects not only the individual with the disease, but also the family. Before long, the disease contributes to a long and vicious cycle which impacts the villages, countries, regions, and the global community.

Those who die from AIDS leave huge gaps in the structure of a community. Those left behind, if they are not already infected with the virus, face even more dire economic circumstances than before which many times lead to malnutrition and activities which make them more susceptible to HIV/AIDS. And the cycle spins forward and gathers momentum.

One of the most pressing problems is that AIDS not only takes away those who farm the soil, it also removes much of the agricultural know-how from the community. Rather than knowledge being passed from generation to generation, this link is broken and families must often sell the animals, seeds and other means of production simply to survive.

There is no easy solution to such a complex and enveloping problem. However, it is clear that a multi-pronged approach is needed. Where appropriate, we must continue to provide food aid to those in need. We must also continue to assist in global AIDS prevention efforts.

It's also obvious that improving nutrition is important in tackling this problem. With proper nutrition, those afflicted with HIV/AIDS may actually live longer and have more time with their families – which will allow them to pass on valuable agricultural knowledge that would otherwise be lost.

We must confront the reality that the current conditions in the developing world because of AIDS require a new look at how best to improve agricultural development. It's also important to develop agricultural production practices in the affected countries that are less labor-intensive and do not rely as much on chemicals. One way is to assist in the growing of crops which are not only nutritious, but also easier to produce.

Of course, there is also wider recognition that certain scientific advances such as biotechnology can improve nutrition, reduce the need for chemicals, and improve the lives of those struggling with the devastation caused by HIV/AIDS.

Alan Larson, Under Secretary of State for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs, has noted that since 1980, 50 percent of the increased agricultural productivity in the developing world resulted from improved seed technology. Biotechnology is clearly one of the most effective means of improving the seeds.

As Mr. Larson said, "The challenge is to make tried and tested biotechnology varieties available to more developing countries and to help develop new varieties

specifically adapted for their conditions. While citing the Vitamin A-enriched "golden rice," Mr. Larson states "Biotechnology may also offer a quicker route for under-nourished populations to get access to a better diet."

Unfortunately, some continue to have unfounded, emotionally-based concerns about even the most careful introduction of biotech crops in other parts of the world. However, when facing such a crisis as exists in Africa, we must not be defeated, in a policy sense, by fearmongering. I believe that critics who base their opposition to biotechnology simply on irrational anxieties do great harm to those they mean to help. They should learn about – and, if possible, see firsthand – the level of the crisis we are confronting.

Certainly, we must take great care to ensure that any biotech efforts are well-designed and appropriate to the situation. However, it is now abundantly clear that biotechnology, if properly employed, can often offer increased production, reduced use of chemicals, and improved nutrition.

Last year, Tony Hall, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations' Agencies for Food and Agriculture, and my former 1978 election Ohio classmate in the U.S. House correctly emphasized the benefits of food derived from biotechnology. As he said, "American children and millions of people around the world have been eating it for years, without ill effects. Biotech foods help nourish the world's hungry, offer tremendous potential for better health and nutrition, and protect the environment by reducing soil erosion and pesticide use." It's also important to note that over 3,200 scientists from around the world, including 20 Nobel Laureates, have determined that biotech products currently on the market pose no greater risk to human health than conventional alternatives.

The challenges are great and the stakes are high. But working together, there is much that can be done to improve nutrition globally. Thank you for attending this forum and I wish you well with your efforts.