



Vilsack Addresses Partners in Agriculture Global Food Security Symposium

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Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today delivered the keynote address at the Partners in Agriculture Global Food Security Symposium sponsored by the U.S. Grains Council. The symposium provided a unique opportunity for government, academic, and civil society leaders from the United States and Japan to come together to discuss the challenge of ensuring food security in the face of a rapidly growing global population and climate change. Vilsack is in Japan to promote stronger ties between the United States and Japan in the area of agriculture as part of President Obama's efforts to expand U.S. exports through the National Export Initiative.

Below are excerpts from Vilsack's remarks as prepared for delivery at the Global Food Symposium:

"Last year's economic woes caused a dramatic increase in the number of people around the world who do not have enough to eat. Estimates from the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization suggest that in 2009, for the first time ever, more than 1 billion people around the world were chronically hungry. And throughout the developing world, a child dies every six seconds from malnutrition and related causes ...

"Food insecurity is first and foremost a moral issue. We should all feel a humanitarian imperative to take on the challenge and ensure that children do not go to sleep hungry. But it goes beyond that.

"No matter where they live, children will only realize their full potential if they have regular access to food. Giving a child the opportunity for a brighter, more productive future, affects not only the individual child, but the community where that child is raised, the country where he or she lives, and all of the world. Working to eliminate food insecurity across the globe will provide incredible economic benefits to developing and developed countries alike. It will increase political stability in conflict and poverty-stricken regions, and put these countries on a path to future prosperity.

"One thing that the statistics do tell us is that the past approaches to global hunger - which focused efforts on providing food aid - are not enough. In the short term, we must still provide food to those who need it most. But in the longer term, we need a comprehensive approach focused on developing sustainable solutions to eliminate food insecurity. Our goals should be to increase the availability of food by helping people and countries produce what they need, to make food accessible to those who need it, and to teach people to use it properly so that they make the most of it ...

"Last year I attended the first ever meeting of G8 agriculture ministers in Italy. We produced a strong declaration of support for the critically important task of promoting food security. And at last year's summit, the G-8 committed to increase international assistance for agricultural development to \$20 billion over the next three years. This year's budget, and President Obama's budget request for next year, put the United States on track to provide at least \$3.5 billion of that total.

"And the truth is this commitment could not have come soon enough. In the coming decades, ensuring global food security will only become more difficult. We face the reality of a world population that is growing by 79 million people each year, the equivalent of 6 Tokyos. Future food demand is expected to increase by 70 percent by 2050 - challenging our capacity to grow and raise enough food....Growth in agricultural productivity, faces increasing threats from scarce water supplies, and competition for energy resources from industry and urbanization.

"Climate change also promises to have an outsized impact on the global food supply. Variations in temperature, increased frequency of extreme weather like drought, floods and storms, and the spread of pests and diseases to new geographic areas will likely impact productivity....These challenges are sobering reminders of why food security must remain at the core of the international agenda. And, they point to a future where investing in agricultural development is the only way to find a permanent solution to hunger.

"As we pursue agricultural development our efforts must be long-term. Quick fixes are not enough. We must help countries find strategies to increase crop outputs by adopting the latest seed technology, improved irrigation systems and land management techniques, and by appropriately applying fertilizer. We should help build strong post-harvest infrastructure like roads and cold storage, and encourage vibrant local markets with transparent information and improved financial services.

"Food security efforts must be country-led and country-driven and focused at the local and community level. That means engaging farmers in small villages so they can provide their ideas about developing the agriculture sector, so that we can help them with technologies, tec

hniques and crops that fit their culture and lifestyle. It means our focus must reflect an understanding of the role of women in farming, who account for between 60 and 80 percent of food production in most developing countries ...

"But as I indicated before, we must utilize all of the appropriate tools in our toolbox - and modern agricultural technologies will play a critical role. Developing countries should look at improved seeds for crops that are drought tolerant or disease resistant. Agricultural biotechnology - with and without genetic engineering - is a powerful tool that can be used to boost agricultural productivity and build prosperity among the rural poor.

"Emerging technologies holds the promise of creating crops that better tolerate drought, toxicity, disease and salinity....Because of its vast potential, it is essential that developing countries around the world develop consistent and science-based regulatory processes governing biotechnology. Regulatory decisions must be based on science and not fear. The biggest costs of not taking advantage of this safe, accessible, productivity-enhancing technology are borne not by the world's affluent consumers, but by the world's poorest farmers ...

"In short, a critical step towards global food security will be achieving a more efficient global market that is based on established international rules that reduce barriers, reduce costs, and increase reliability of trading systems.

"In the months and years ahead, it is incumbent on both the United States and Japan to work together to tackle the food security crisis. Helping countries through broad-based agricultural growth makes moral and economic sense. We only have to look at the example of Japan to see the impact development assistance can make. Since the end of World War II, Japan has moved from a food aid recipient to the thriving developed country we see today - with one of the strongest economies in the world. Today we are vibrant trading partners, a relationship that benefits both our countries citizens.

"In the coming years and decades we must give the world's poor a reason for hope by tackling food security with a renewed commitment to agricultural development. The world's economic and political stability, and the prosperity of our two nations, depends on how well we meet this challenge."

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