

The Private College Focuses on World Hunger

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of an agriculture department based in a private liberal arts college in the context of the world hunger issue. While the small college can not make the major contributions to agricultural research necessary for a renewed "green revolution," it can continue to serve an important role in training the human resources needed for international agricultural development. Agriculture staff located in a small private college can, via interdisciplinary teaching experience, communicate the true facts of agricultural production and distribution to a growing urban population.

In evaluating the mission of a private college in the context of the current world hunger problem, it is assumed that the production of food is very much related to challenges of growing population, limited supplies of energy, world trade, and the existing international monetary system. It is also assumed that students and staff at all institutions of higher education are concerned about the ability of people throughout the world to maintain reasonable standards of living. It is in this spirit of concern and background of interrelationship of international problems, that this paper focuses upon world hunger.

With shortfalls in world cereal production caused by changing weather conditions, (1) the challenge of the current world food situation has vividly become a concern of the entire world community. In this context, each institution of higher education must examine its own ability to assist in balancing the food population equation. Colleges of agriculture within North America have special resources to apply to efforts of increasing food productivity via the training of future agriculture leaders, researchers, and teachers for both developed and developing nations.

The larger state institution has the resources for major efforts in both training of agricultural workers and conducting research programs related to possible technological breakthroughs. What, then, is the unique mission of an agriculture department based within a private liberal arts college? This paper attempts to answer this question, in the context of the world hunger issue in particular, and, in a broader sense out of need to communicate the challenges of agricultural production to a growing urban population throughout the world.

The base of experience used for this report is a small Quaker college located in a rural community with a very

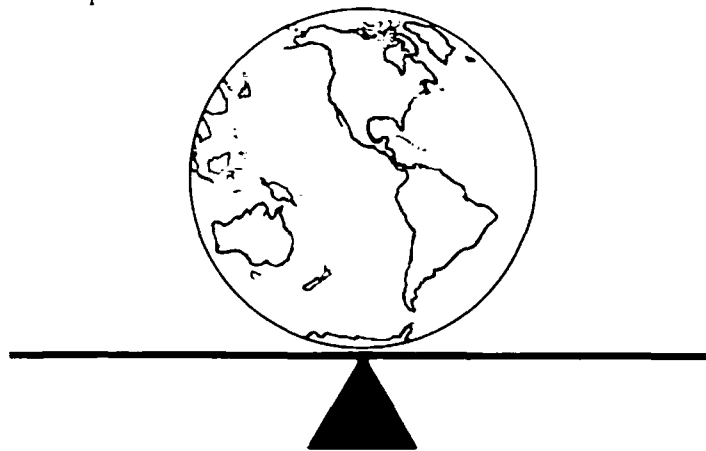
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strong interest in international affairs. Without this broad-based institutional support and interest in the world community, an agriculture department could easily limit its focus to micro-problems confronting the American farmer in his continued adjustment to changing technology and widely fluctuating domestic farm prices.

Service as a "Solid Benchmark"

The Quaker liberal arts college tends to attract socially concerned students and staff who are at least a generation away from the practical realities of food production and distribution. In this context an agriculture department must serve as a solid benchmark for the highly idealistic student. The real opportunity for sharing the world hunger concern is best realized via an intense interdisciplinary teaching program, focused on nonagricultural students (2). A course that studies world hunger is topical in nature and there are fluctuations in student interest depending on the degree of concern for the broader world community. Because of the limited agricultural backgrounds of interested students, the "world hunger" course has presented special communication problems related to the technical and economic aspects of agriculture production.

No agricultural teaching unit in either a small or a large institution should attempt interdisciplinary teaching in the area of agricultural development without an array of staff within the academic community with actual field experience in the less developed nations. To effectively evaluate the production and marketing aspects of agricultural development within the focus of world hunger requires more than a secondary interest in the topic.



Contributions May Vary

Most small agriculture departments in either private or state institutions will be unable to make a direct contribution to the solution of the world hunger problem. Their contribution will be related primarily to the effectiveness of individual staff members in combining the practical and the academic work of international agriculture within the framework of a postsecondary program that is primarily concerned with domestic problems.

A limited number of agriculture departments in small institutions will be able to translate technical agricultural problems of less developed nations into a format that can be understood by a growing urban population in North America. This urban population must then, through the political progress, influence government policy related to the reallocation of financial resources from the rich to the poor nations of the world.

Many church-related colleges are now hearing mission statements on the hunger issues from their affiliated societies or denominations. Because of a lack of technical information, some church groups are suggesting new consumer or production patterns, or both, that will have limited affect upon the real problems of world hunger. For example, singling out the beef industry of North America may actually result in a negative impact upon the total production of food. The small agriculture department must help the related church groups sort out the facts of the world food situation and determine a positive strategy — a strategy that places major emphasis on technical assistance programs that help developing nations improve their ability to produce food and fiber.

Evaluation of the real facts of world hunger can further be confused by North American college students and church groups in considering increased agricultural production versus lower personal consumption (3). The low consumption strategy is a basic way of attempting to understand the problems of hungry people. It alone is not necessarily a way of seriously confronting the current world food situation. Less food consumed in North America does not mean more food available for consumption in South Asia or in the droughty countries of Africa.

A surplus of food in the developed nations of the world must be physically moved to areas where it is needed, but, more important, such shipments must be financed. Unless national governments and international bodies are willing to invest increasingly more of their gross national product in special food sales (for example, through Public Law 480), a surplus of food related to low consumption in North America will simply lower agricultural prices for farmers.

The Real Conquest of Hunger

The real conquest of world hunger is to be found in systematic improvement of agricultural sectors in the less developed countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Rural development in these countries means supplying the opportunities of modern technology to the small far-

mers now operating without benefit of water control, improved seeds, and fertilizer. The agriculture college in North America can train the human resources needed for this major effort to increase village-level productivity.

The 1950s and 1960s provided the first major experience for agriculture colleges and universities from North America to work with host nations in the process of institutional development. The job of building the agricultural training centers in the less developed countries is far from complete. Colleges of agriculture must again in the late 1970s return to the dual challenge of offering excellent training to American students at home, while assisting new institutions in the developing world in building their own capabilities for training the human resources required for local agricultural development.

Summary

The mission of the agriculture department in a private liberal arts college is first to do an excellent job in training its own agricultural students. However, this training effort need not be limited to technical and economic problems of a modern agriculture sector. Second, the agriculture department has an unusual opportunity to communicate realistic facts of agricultural production and distribution to nonagricultural students and staff. This opportunity may be realized via an intense interdisciplinary teaching experience centered on the world food situation. In the broadest sense, a liberal arts college without instruction in agriculture is limiting its scope of education.

A third role for the agriculture department in a private college may be a kind of consultant's role for highly concerned individuals within the institution and within the related church groups. This may mean an active role in translating the facts of world hunger into a form usable for action groups in influencing government policy dealing with distribution of the world's limited resources such as food and energy.

The private college must stand ready to supply trained human resources to sister institutions within the developing world. It is quite possible that a pool of trained manpower from several small institutions may supply special staff needs of a new institution in a less developed country. All institutions of higher education must be prepared to serve the broader world community in an increased effort in agricultural development.

Footnotes

¹The major shortfalls in cereal production in 1972 were related to droughts, typhoons, and flooding in several areas of the world (USSR, Southeast Asia, Argentina, India, and sub-Saharan Africa).

²The interdisciplinary course at Wilmington College is entitled "World Hunger and the Green Revolution." Teaching materials for the course have included packets from the Freedom from Hunger Foundation and materials from international agencies such as Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Bank group.

³G. C. Eller, "Production versus Low Consumption," *Messenger* April 1975, pp. 28-30. This is a challenging statement from a periodical of the Church of Brethren, encouraging more attention to increased output per acre.