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Secs. Clinton, Vilsack: export more expertise, less grain for aid

By Jon H. Harsch

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Marking World Food Day Oct. 16, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton held a joint press conference Friday to stress the urgent need for, as Clinton explained, "Fighting hunger and poverty through sustainable agricultural development."

Both Vilsack and Clinton insisted that while humanitarian food-aid donations will continue, U.S. policy needs to shift toward greater emphasis on supporting agricultural development programs overseas. Vilsack said that because "for the first time ever, more than one billion people around the world are chronically hungry. . . Our goals should be to increase the availability of food by helping people in other countries produce what they need, to make that food accessible to those who need it, and to teach people to use it properly." Mrs. Clinton echoed the point: "As Tom said, we think that you can have sustainable, productive agriculture that is really aimed at giving people the tools that they need to help support themselves."

**"The true sign of success is not whether we're the source of perpetual aid that helps people scrape by, it's whether we are partners in building the capacity for transformational change."
— President Barack Obama**

Clinton, picked to head an Obama administration global food security initiative, explained that "We want to help small farmers world-wide produce more food. We want to make sure that food gets to market and reaches the people who need it. That means strengthening the entire farming chain, from labs where scientists develop improved seeds, to fields where farmers are laboring sunup to sundown. . . We are very pleased to be part of a commitment along with other nations of more than \$22 billion over three years to spur agricultural-led economic growth."

"The question is not whether we can end hunger, it's whether we will." — U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

Vilsack said that “I think the nations of the world have begun to agree that the past practice of solely relying on food aid is not enough to solve this problem and I think there is consensus that a comprehensive approach as the Secretary just outlined is needed, one that is focused on sustainability.” He said USDA will use its research and extension expertise to provide developing countries with “technical assistance, whether it is small drip irrigation; whether it is dealing with plant disease, pests, invasive species; or whatever it might be. . . We look forward to encouraging sustainable practices and the use of good technology based on sound science.”

Promising a “far more flexible and far more comprehensive” approach to global food security, Vilsack said instead of relying solely on shipping U.S. farm products overseas, “We’ve got to make the farmers around the world more productive.” That approach could reduce U.S. farm exports but Vilsack predicted that other countries will “get to a point where they are in a position to trade their surplus, which we believe, will ultimately result in the capacity of those countries to purchase goods and services from America on a value-added basis, which will help our economy.”

For more information, visit the State Department’s “Global Hunger and Food Security” website at <http://www.state.gov/s/globalfoodsecurity/>.

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