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On Behalf of the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, let me join Bert and USDA in welcoming you to this conference.

In bringing together everyone involved in food aid, this conference gives us the chance not just to discuss what's new in food aid and learn from each other, but to celebrate the importance and successes of the U.S. food aid program, and how it brings hope to millions around the world.

As I grew up going to hockey games so I'd like to draw a hockey analogy. It is said that Wayne Gretzky became a great hockey player by taking his father's advice to skate to where the puck is going, not where it is.

For food aid to continue to bring hope to people, we need to do the same – anticipate the future context of food aid so that we can be in a position to make the most of this great resource.

I'd like to speak for a few minutes today about events over the last year, what they tell us about the future context of food aid, and some of the steps we are taking at USAID to meet future challenges.

It has been an important year for food aid, from WTO negotiations to G-8 announcements. But I'd like to focus on a string of events that – when taken together – elucidate some important trends.

The last 12 months, from the previous conference to this one, saw, for the first time, major humanitarian crises triggered by poor rains in three areas of Africa: Niger in West Africa, southern Africa, and pastoralist areas of East Africa.

These events, in fact, confirm some major factors that we see as having an increasingly large impact on food aid.

First, the potential for famine in Africa is increasing. These three crises were triggered by poor rains, but they occurred in areas where populations are becoming more destitute and chronically vulnerable, and less able to cope with what have always been regularly recurring poor rains.

The underlying causes are poverty, inadequate investment in agriculture, and poor governance. But this vulnerability is especially severe in areas with

high numbers of pastoralists who move with their herds and people infected with HIV/AIDS.

When I served in East Africa during major crises in the early 1990s and in 2000, such major food crises were rare. While war threatened famine in some places, as it still does, elsewhere in Africa people managed to cope with occasional poor rains or droughts.

This is less and less true. We used to see these crises occur every 10 years, then every 5, and now every few years. What we are witnessing is a cumulative effect: With each crisis, more people are pushed closer to the edge, and it takes less and less to push them over.

Second, food aid can be very effective when provided early in a crisis. In southern Africa this year, early delivery of large amounts of food aid prevented people from becoming severely malnourished, which makes them more likely to die.

It also enabled families to survive the crisis without having to resort to desperate measures of selling animals and farm tools, or eating the seeds they would plant. These things drive families into destitution, and make them more vulnerable next time there are poor rains.

Food aid can save livelihoods, as well as lives.

Third, the time it takes to deliver U.S. food aid requires very early warning of potential famines. While we can sometimes expedite shipments of food aid, from the time of a decision, it takes on average up to four months for the commodities to arrive. So these decisions must be made well before the food is needed.

Even with advances in early warning, it is hard to know if poor rains will result in a temporary food shortage or a famine.

The bottom line of these factors is this: If food aid is to remain a beacon of hope for people who need it the most – those facing an impending famine – we need to be in a position to meet these new challenges of more people living closer to the edge and facing potential famines in several places at the same time.

Over the last year at Food for Peace, we have been accelerating several initiatives that will help in this regard.

- Implementing the new FFP strategy that focuses on vulnerable groups to help build their ability to cope with the next drought or flood.

- Working with PVOs to shift multi-year development programs to the most food insecure countries, helping people most likely to face emergencies and famine, as well as allowing PVOs to be in place to rapidly expand programs to provide emergency feeding.
- Developing additional early warning, planning and budgeting tools within FFP to help us make more rapid and informed decisions on how to allocate emergency food aid.
- Working with Capitol Hill and stakeholders to address concerns about the President's budget request that would allow for some Title II funding to be used to procure food locally in an emergency to allow for more rapid and effective responses in certain cases.
- Expanding current prepositioning of U.S. commodities, to the extent possible, by seeking additional sites, possibly in Africa, thereby significantly reducing the time it takes to get food to those most likely to need it.
- Working with WFP and other donors to improve assessments of emergency food aid, which will help ensure that what food aid is available will be provided to those who need it most.

- Working with USTR, USDA and PVOs to ensure that World Trade Organization talks do not impinge on the most vital aspects of our food aid program.

I started my remarks by talking about the importance of food aid and how it brings hope. Let me return to that.

What is great about food aid is that when you go abroad and actually see the food being given to hungry people you witness a tangible link between Americans who grow, process, and transport the food, and the people who need it to survive and prosper.

This is very powerful, and it is what makes me very proud to be representing FFP here.

I will stop here and thank you for allowing me this chance to give you a quick overview of some recent trends and what we are doing at FFP.