

**USDA & USAID
Export Food Aid Conference V
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Kansas City, Missouri
Title: Our Commitment to a Healthy World**

Thank you for that kind introduction. And I think we also need to thank again Sue King and Austin Merrick, among many others here today, who worked so hard to put this conference together.

It's a real pleasure to be back here in Kansas City again at the USDA and AID sixth Annual Export Food Aid Conference. It's an honor for me to be sharing the stage with Mary Chambliss, whom I've now worked with for probably 15 years – largely in the food aid venue. I can't believe that when we first hosted the conference back in 1995 – in an empty store in a local shopping center – we had a total of 59 people in attendance – and nearly 30 percent of those were from the government! And now look at us! At last count we had more than 700 signed up! I can't help but think that getting the online registration might have had something to do with it. Technology! Together, we have come a long way, in many more ways than one! Yet, we're all here for the same reason we first met in that empty store – because hunger continues to be a blight on society – and because those of us in this room accept some responsibility for helping address hunger through the

generosity of many. As Secretary Veneman said earlier, we all take much pride in the vital role each of us plays in a very noble cause.

As Mary mentioned, the United States has a long history of food aid, and in our efforts to make it as effective as possible, we have always been challenged by weather, natural disasters, political instability, and the marketplace. While we always seem to be able to deal with the weather and natural disasters – not easily, I must admit – and political instability has – unfortunately – become one of those realities that become a complicated part of the puzzle – the marketplace this year has become one of the biggest challenges we have faced in years. You heard about that some in this morning’s discussions. Historically high commodity prices and transportation costs that are off of the charts have become one of the biggest challenges we have seen in years! It’s like *The Perfect Storm*. Commodity prices have skyrocketed and shipping rates have catapulted. All of this quickly translates into fewer dollars and tons of products being delivered to the needy. And searching for the silver bullet is a daunting challenge. Hopefully, through the presentations you’ll hear from some of the world’s leading humanitarians and the ensuing discussions throughout the week, ideas will evolve and solutions devised.

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) plays an integral part of the U.S. food aid delivery system, particularly since the Commodity Credit Corporation began its role with P.L. 480. And I might add that – not only is P.L. 480 celebrating its 50 Birthday, the Commodity Credit Corporation is celebrating its 75th year! So it is a time for celebration. FSA, hand-in-hand with our sister agencies – the Foreign Agricultural Service and the Agency for International Development – as well as volunteer organizations, shares the responsibility for delivering humanitarian food needs throughout the world. FSA's role – particularly in times of surplus – involves purchasing and maintaining commodity reserves destined solely for meeting emergency needs. Export food aid is like a homemade quilt. Everyone makes up a piece of the whole – but each of these pieces has a profound effect on the appearance and the reality of the finished product. And while all of us here in this room make up a piece of the quilt, the largest element of the quilt begins in the abundant fields of America. It's transformed through the hard work of many hands – and ends up in the mouths of hungry people, many of whom are children. So our commitment that is represented here this week will surely yield better results.

Speaking of yields, yields are one of the reasons that America remains the breadbasket of the world. In 1900, farmers made up 38 percent of the American work force. One farmer could supply the needs of 14 people. By 1950, farmers

made up just 2.6 percent of the labor force. It then took one farmer to supply the food needs for 26 people. Their yields nearly doubled. By 2000 – the percentage of farmers decreased to 2.1 percent, feeding 139 people. Yields are going through the roof.

Since 1900, corn yields per acre have more than quadrupled (from nearly 30 bushels an acre to more than 140 on average); wheat yields per acre have also quadrupled (from 2 bushels an acre to more than 44); and soybean production has done the same. Machines, improved methods and fertilizers, and better research have moved agriculture toward greater efficiencies. With the improved yields – particularly in years of plenty – the United States faced the task of dealing with the abundance. And as you heard from Mary Chambliss a few minutes ago, President Eisenhower helped P.L. 480 and Food for Peace become a reality in 1954 to help utilize the U.S. bounty and – more importantly – help meet humanitarian food needs around the world. And over the last five years alone, Food For Peace has shipped nearly 12 million metric tons to feed the world's hungry and support agricultural and economic development. Ms. Chambliss spoke about the tremendous work we have done under the other food aid programs, including Food for Progress, Food for Education, Section 416 (b) Program, and the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust. I'd like to mention that under the Bill Emerson Trust,

formerly the Food Security Wheat Reserve, Iraq received more than 81,000 metric tons of commodities, while Ethiopia also received nearly 300,000 metric tons in emergency food aid.

Collectively, over the last couple of the years, FSA and our partners have been instrumental in providing assistance in some of the most volatile parts of the world, including Afghanistan, North Korea, and the Southern Africa region. We applaud all of the brave people who have helped deliver the assistance. As the war in Iraq unfolded, we provided nonfat dry milk through the World Food Programme – requiring major coordination between our staffs, dairy plants, instantizers, and repackaging facilities across the country. This coordination and the many other partnerships represent pieces of the handmade quilt that permeates international food aid.

I share with each of you the pride of knowing that our aid is helping provide food for millions to survive and build a better life. I've heard first hand from people like George Aldaya, Director of the Kansas City Commodity Office, and Hillary White, of the Secretary's Office – what a thrill it is to meet those people who are on the receiving end of our bounty. George spent 7 months in Northern Iraq, overseeing food distribution under difficult conditions, and Hillary has spent even

more time in Baghdad working on social issues. Both have demonstrated exemplary service to the United States. We owe a debt of gratitude to them both, as well as other USDA employees who have served and still serve in Iraq. And there are so many more involved – especially you. Being here today is an opportunity for me to thank everyone who participates in this wide-sweeping effort.

I hope that you are continually inspired like I am to do more – because there’s more we can accomplish. I want to hear your ideas and goals for helping reduce the number of people who nightly go to bed hungry. And I look forward to working with you in the future. Thank you for being an important part of this meeting and for your efforts in international food aid. You are all making a tremendous difference in creating a world without hunger. And I have to quote the Secretary again: “Solving hunger can solve so many problems.”