

World hunger

Recipe for reform

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We grow enough food. So why do so many still go hungry?

FOR all the complaints about modern farming, agriculture is one of the great success stories of the post-war period: the world produces twice as much grain as it did in 1960, on only a third more land—enough to provide 2,700 calories a day for every person on the planet.

Yet, more than 800m people are still chronically malnourished, most of them in the developing world. As “Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime” argues, to say that hunger is strictly a distribution problem is like saying that if the rain fell evenly over the earth there would be no droughts; the origins of, and solutions to, this mismatch between food and hungry mouths are rather more complex.

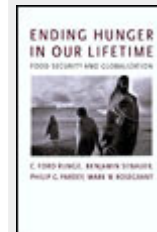
Many of the hungry in poor places are farmers themselves. Their failure to grow—and earn—enough stems from a variety of reasons, from a lack of access to modern farming tools to environmental constraints to poor roads which prevent them from reaching markets. The book offers a clear explanation of the agricultural problems confronting the world's hungry. But its value lies in putting these physical challenges in a wider social context, looking at other factors, such as women's education, which affect household food security.

It also challenges popular misconceptions—for example, that patents on genes held by multinational companies are hampering farmers in developing countries; as the book argues, there are few patents on the current generation of high-tech crops in most desperately poor places. Lack of market incentives and funding, rather than intellectual property rights, are the real brakes on research into crops of greatest interest to the poor. “Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime” also provides a lucid discussion of the problems, and tremendous promise, of trade liberalisation and offers a robust critique of why those governments, in rich and poor countries alike, which aspire to self-sufficiency in food production, or turn to protectionism, end up hurting everyone, including their own.

The authors offer a number of sensible remedies to such ills, including different ways of boosting investment in public agricultural research and possible reforms at multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organisation. One of the book's bolder proposals (one also advocated by *The Economist*) is the creation of a Global Environmental Organisation, to deal with a

Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime: Food Security and Globalization

By C. Ford Runge, Benjamin Senauer, Philip G. Pardey and Mark W. Rosegrant



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range of "green" issues, some of which relate closely to farming, and which are proving particularly tricky for the World Trade Organisation.

As the authors acknowledge, there is little chance of business-as-usual halving the number of hungry by 2015, a goal enthusiastically endorsed by world leaders in 1996. But with the right "pro-poor" policies, the book predicts that the number of malnourished children in the world could fall almost threefold, to 57m by 2025; if such steps are neglected, however, that number could rise to 178m, with Africa bearing the brunt.