

Food for Peace Program Marks 50 Years

Fifty years ago, President Eisenhower created the Food for Peace program to share our country's rich harvests with those in need in postwar Europe and other countries. The 106 million metric tons of food aid that the United States has sent overseas over the past 50 years under the Public Law 480 (PL 480) food aid program—now called Food for Peace—have kept approximately 3 billion people in 150 countries from hunger, malnutrition, and starvation.

Early in his administration, President Kennedy underlined the importance of PL 480 to the United States and the rest of the world by renaming it "Food for Peace" and placing it in the newly created U.S. Agency for International Development. Programs currently focus primarily on sub-Saharan Africa and Asia where the objectives are the same as they were 50 years ago: fighting hunger and malnutrition and promoting sustained economic growth and development.

"The secret of Food for Peace's success," said USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios, "lies in the unique combination of American compassion together with the unmatched efficiency of our nation's farmers. It is less a triumph of government than of working Americans, for in its essence, Food for Peace is the work of farmers, businessmen, grain elevator operators, truckers, bargemen, freight forwarders, port operations, NGOs, PVOs, and government officials."

Through the PL 480, Title II program, USAID makes food commodity donations to cooperating sponsors (private voluntary organizations, cooperatives, and international agencies) to address the needs of food security through both long-term development projects and emergency food assistance. As the food aid arm of the United Nations, the World Food Programme (WFP) is

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Food for Peace's biggest emergency response partner and has delivered assistance in recent crises from Afghanistan to Iraq, Sudan, Ethiopia, and the countries of southern Africa. Eighty-three countries contributed to WFP in either 2002 or 2003, but U.S. contributions outweighed all 82 others combined, accounting for 60 percent of the world's food aid.

In 2003, approximately 13.2 million Ethiopians needed emergency food assistance. Fortunately, USAID had monitored conditions closely, and Food for Peace began shipments months before the crisis peaked. Food for Peace food aid totaled more than 1 million metric tons, helping avert widespread famine and preventing the large population movements that contributed greatly to the high mortality associated with the 1984–85 famine.

Since October 2002, the Consortium for the Southern Africa Food Security Emergency—composed of U.S.-based NGOs and funded by the Office of Food for Peace—has been working in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, countries that have been plagued by drought and, in some cases, devastating agricultural policies. The consortium has fed some 4.5 million people and provided food-for-work activities to renovate roads and irrigation systems. Another important part of the program distributes food aid to those directly affected by HIV/AIDS.

Many East African countries are still facing serious food emergencies including Sudan (and parts of Chad that Sudanese refugees have fled to), as well as portions of Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, and Kenya. In Southern Africa, fewer countries are in need of emergency food aid or require less assistance this year as more favorable weather conditions have improved crop production, but vulnerable groups in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe still are in need of supplemental food aid. Zimbabwe poses a serious challenge because, in spite of evidence to the contrary, the government has indicated it expects a bumper crop and will not require food aid assistance.

USAID continues to closely monitor conditions that affect food security throughout sub-Saharan Africa through its Famine Early Warning System, which uses U.S. satellite technology to identify early signs of drought by monitoring meteorological, crop, and rangeland conditions.

For additional information, visit www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/ffp/50th/ and www.fews.net.