

Confidential Memo

To: IATP Board Members and Friends

From: Mark Ritchie

Date: May 20, 1996

Re: World Grain Shortage and the World Food Summit

Each day brings additional information about the dangerously low levels of world grain stocks we now have and about weather and other difficulties facing farmers worldwide as they attempt to plant and harvest their next crop.

Here at IATP, we have been on the phone, fax and internet with as many people as possible to get a sense of analysis and ideas that can help guide our response to this situation. The feedback we are getting outlines the following major items:

- 1) We need to continue to point out the problem -- the shortages -- since most people and most policymakers seem to be missing this situation.
- 2) We need to talk about the causes of the problem, especially about the policies of the past decade or so and how they contributed to the present situation. This needs to include an analysis of other explanations that are being put forward, like those arguing that the current shortage is due to increasing population or too many farmers on too small of plots of land.
- 3) We need to put forward concrete, positive proposals for solutions including a system for emergency reserves.
- 4) We need to be critiquing some of the suggested solutions being put forward by agribusiness, like their calls for more pesticides and more biotech and
- 5) In the midst of this immediate crisis, we need to be presenting a coherent long-term strategy.

With the upcoming World Food Summit (and other key meetings like the founding of the WTO and meetings on the Conservation of Plant Genetic Resources) we have an opportunity to put forward a strong, clear message.

But what should that be???????

We are writing to you for your reactions to the following specific idea. It is not a fully developed plan, but rather a beginning point for an idea. We would like to talk to each of you individually about this, and if we believe it would be useful we will also schedule a tele-conference call for a group discussion

A Simple Idea

We believe that the time is ripe for proposing a global **Convention on Food Security**. Patterned after the Montreal Protocols which gave equal weight to the North and the South, this treaty would spell out the steps that countries can take to promote global food security, the measures that they would be barred from taking because they damage food security, and global, cooperative measures like emergency stocks that are taken at the inter-governmental level to help promote sustainable food security.

Among the items that such a **Convention** might address:

- 1) Prohibitions against export dumping
- 2) Promotion of domestic food security measures
- 3) Anti-trust provisions to prohibit predatory and other anti-competitive business practices that harm food security
- 4) Cooperatively manage early warning response systems
- 5) Adequate emergency stocks totally isolated from the market
- 6) Outlines of procedures for food aid that does not harm food security
- 7) A Secretariat assigned the task of on-going analysis of the actions of government agencies for their impacts on food security

A general outline of this idea would be developed, circulated to everyone we can reach, and then there would be a full-scale discussion about this at the NGO meetings right before the November World Food Summit. If the idea began to take off, then the next task would be to assemble an "Eminent Persons" group to then take it to a few specially selected governments who we believe would consider taking this as their own idea and begin to pursue it in official government forums.

Once an overall document/treaty text is written it provides a background for analyzing the current GATT rules in order to determine how they should be changed as part of the re-write of the GATT and plant patenting rules being reviewed in 1999.

What Do You Think

We think there is merit to this idea, but we also believe that there are many other ideas that need to be explored and options considered. This memo is to get you thinking and to get your feedback not only on this specific idea, but on how you are thinking about this overall situation in general.