

Welcome, Jim



2  years

The board of directors and staff
of the
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
welcome

Jim Harkness
as our new President

Jim Harkness joins IATP from the World Wildlife Fund in China, where he expanded the organization's profile from a strict focus on conservation of biodiversity to also addressing the consequences of China's economic growth on a broader sustainable development agenda. Jim oversaw the growth of WWF China from 10 staff with a budget of \$1 million a year in 1999 to 70 staff with a budget of \$6 million in 2005. From 1995–1999, Jim worked as the Ford Foundation's Environment and Development Program Officer. He managed Ford's China portfolio which supported innovative efforts to alleviate rural poverty and sustainably manage natural resources. Jim has written and spoken frequently on China and sustainable development, and has served as an adviser for the World Bank and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. Jim grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He's a graduate of the University of Wisconsin where he majored in Asian Studies. He received his graduate degree in Development Sociology from Cornell University.

Q. What lessons about sustainable development can the rest of the world learn from China's experience?

A. One of the most urgent lessons a country like the United States could learn has to do with climate change. Despite being a developing country, and heavily dependent on coal, China has made strong commitments to controlling its greenhouse gas emissions, including higher fuel efficiency standards than the U.S. and a promise to get 20 percent of their energy from renewable sources by 2020.

Of course, we are learning some less positive lessons from China as well. The recent toxic spill in northeast China and violent protests against polluting factories in the south show that delivering economic growth alone does not make a society sustainable.

*Without democracy and accountability,
even a country with double-digit growth
is susceptible to environmental disaster and social unrest.*

Q. Rural poverty and the loss of farmers are challenges in developed and developing countries alike.

What do you see as some of the key strategies for addressing these global problems?

A. It's dangerous to oversimplify problems and solutions when the endowments of land, labor and capital differ so much around the world. That said, there do seem to be some common problems that plague farmers the world over: over-concentration of political and economic power, whether in the hands of large landowners or agribusinesses; business practices and government policies that favor urban over rural and large producer over small; pricing systems that hide the real costs of production and the real value of natural resources; trading rules that allow dumping of undervalued farm goods, undermining local production; and insecure land or resource tenure. These can make the already tough job of running a farm impossible.

*We need to change the rules of the game
so farmers have a more even playing field, whether that means securing their most
basic rights, reforming the global trading system
or exposing the abuses of agribusiness.*

Governments should help with supply management, and provide better extension and other services to small farmers. More ag research should be focused on improving the types of farming that poor people depend on, such as rain-fed or mixed farming systems. And farmers need access to credit, technology, information and forms of organization—such as cooperatives, producer associations, farmers unions—through which they can secure a better deal in the marketplace.

. You grew up in Minnesota.
How has that experience shaped
your view of the world?
How has your international
experience changed the way
you look at Minnesota?

A. I certainly think my love for nature and concern about the environment were nurtured in Minnesota. A lot of environmentalists trace their early inspiration to *Silent Spring* or *Sand County Almanac*, but—believe it or not—I grew up following the Reserve Mining case on WCCO and cheering for the crusading Judge Miles Lord!

I'm a Minneapolis boy and spent much of my childhood playing along Minnehaha Creek and swimming in Lake Harriet. On spring mornings, I'd be at Roberts Bird Sanctuary or Afton State Park with my Dad, mesmerized by the song of a wood thrush or sight of a pileated woodpecker.

Of course, living in such a green place, you can come to take all that for granted. But having spent the past eleven-plus years in Beijing, a city of 15 million that regularly appears on lists of the world's most polluted cities, I don't have that problem!

I went to Minneapolis Central High School, which was at the time one of the only public schools in the country offering Chinese as a language option. My teacher, Margaret Wong, was one of those rare teachers who had a big impact on her students' lives—on lots of us, not only me. She taught not just the language, but also history, culture, even a bit of cooking. I was hooked, and I have sort of been tromping back and forth between Minnesota and China ever since, always looking at one place with the other in mind, comparing and contrasting. Staying with a Chinese farm family last month over Chinese New Year, I couldn't help but think of my relatives farming (also corn!) in Redwood Falls. And when I'm in a protected area in China, I wonder how they deal with similar problems in Superior National Forest. I hope that if nothing else, it has made me a little less arrogant as an American, less willing to assume that the richest or most powerful society is necessarily the one with all the answers.



Q. Many of the key global challenges we face—from rural poverty to climate change—seem to transcend borders. What should be the role of global institutions in addressing these types of problems?

A. This is precisely why we have global institutions! The problem is that governments of wealthier nations have been more interested in building institutions that promote the deregulation of trade than those that promote social justice or protect the environment. So we have a World Trade Organization but no World Environmental Organization.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and its allies are working to expose this imbalance and build social and environmental values into existing institutions such as the WTO. Global trade is not inherently anti-people, but trade rules written by and for wealthier countries can devastate the rural poor. Developing-country farmers can't compete with artificially cheap imports from rich countries, but current WTO rules limit national governments' ability to protect their own farm and food security.

*We are working toward
a more transparent, democratic global trading regime —
one that manages trade for the benefit of everyone,
not just multinational agribusinesses.
There's a lot to be done to strengthen existing multilateral
environmental agreements as well, to keep them
from being undermined or superseded by trade rules.*

But global institutions aren't the only means at our disposal for addressing global issues. Local and national political action, as well as alliances among citizen groups around the world, are also essential. And we can also directly influence the private sector. One of the good things that globalization has brought us is a world where multinational corporations have a harder and harder time hiding their behavior or the actions of their suppliers. And when scandals or disasters are brought to light, it hits them where it hurts: their share price! A few enlightened companies have taken steps to make sure that people and the planet are respected all along their supply chains, and we have more power than we realize to persuade others to follow suit.

Q. Looking forward five years, what role do you see the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy playing in the world of sustainable development?

A. IATP already has a well-earned reputation as a leader in supporting sustainable development and rural communities with information, innovation and advocacy. I see the need for our kind of work growing in the coming years. We can do even more, for instance, to take on agribusiness supply chain issues; to build strong programs and partnerships in major developing country agriculture centers like India, China and Brazil; to identify, develop, support and share innovative solutions with farmers, businesses and consumers; as well as helping to define and push forward the broader progressive social and environmental agenda in Minnesota and globally.



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Jim with villagers in Baimai, China

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