

The world food crisis

The world is facing a food crisis. A billion people — most of them in the developing world — suffer from chronic hunger or serious nutritional deficiencies. More than half a billion — primarily in the industrialized nations of the world — are obese.

These global food imbalances are likely to grow worse in the years ahead. The world's population is expected to increase by almost a billion by 2025, putting pressure on natural resources like land and water, which will undermine many nations' ability to feed themselves. War and other forms of conflict are putting food supplies at risk, unfettered and uneven market forces are buffeting food prices, climate change is altering production capabilities and unequal treatment of women is slowing social progress.

Hunger affects people of all ages, social backgrounds and ethnic groups: Those in urban slums, landless farmers, the elderly, orphans, women, rural communities and above all, children. Hunger kills more people every year than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. Those it doesn't kill suffer severe, often lifelong physical effects including stunting and wasting. Hungry children do less well in school and hungry adults are less productive and contribute less to local and regional progress.

In the United States, nearly 50 million people have trouble putting food on the table each day. In 2012, 16 million American children lived in food insecure households. In California, 16 percent of households are food insecure, defined as lacking access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

Meanwhile, the industrialized world is confronting an epidemic of overweight and obesity, which kills as many as 3.4 million adults each year. This form of malnutrition, once the exclusive problem of wealthy nations, is surfacing in middle-income countries and now affects more than a billion people worldwide, including more than 40 million children under the age of 5.

We're ready to show our commitment by launching the University of California Global Food Initiative — first on our campuses, then in California, then around the world. The solution to the food crisis, one of the most critical problems of our age, is within our reach. All of us must work together — drawing on our varied strengths and understanding that our preferred approach to fixing the problem is just part of an overall solution — to put the world on the path to sustainably and nutritiously feeding itself.