The food system in the U.S. is holding together in the early weeks of the COVID Crisis - aside from the price spikes that come with panic buying, the supply chain of commodity crops looks fairly solid. But an overabundance of commodity crops doesn’t solve our country’s hunger problems. And doubling down on this flawed system won’t just fix hunger - it’ll spawn new disease.

US Farmers Cover Their Production Costs

America’s robust production of corn, wheat, soy and meat comes at a financial, social and ecological cost. Much of that cost was shouldered by farmers themselves. Before COVID, farmers faced debt levels comparable to the 1980 farm crisis. In Nebraska, for instance, the average farm debt was $1.3 million in 2017. What this leverage paid for was a food system filled with expensive machinery, crops and animals engineered for productive efficiency.

Monocultures Eliminate Diversity

Look to fields or factory farms, and what you’ll find are concentrations of genetic uniformity. These monocultures eliminate natural diversity and vigor. They are terrific incubators of profit and of disease; output is the product of exploitation. Farmland workers are exposed to horrific conditions with, for example, basic rights to organize or any means of someday owning their own land. Those farm workers are right now at high risk of exposure to novel coronavirus, with many living in the kinds of crowded and unsanitary conditions ripe for contagion.

Hunger Will Deepen in America

It is certain that with job losses and panic buying, the supply chain of essential goods will fail. This will happen both because the system is overabundant but cannot sustainably meet our needs and because such systems can’t provide a robust supply of food and shelter with prejudice.

If the stimulus last time failed to return us to merely outrageous levels of hunger in this country, perhaps it’s time for a package that doesn’t compound the errors of our food, fuel, financial and social systems. Rather than double down on an industrial system that will, inevitably, spawn new disease and compound it with hunger and climate change, we can and should do better. Continue on pg. 15

Farm Justice Equals Fair Price

The solution to low farm prices is fair justice - farmers getting paid a fair price for producing an ethical product. Just as during the Great Depression of the 1930s, we need neither subsidy payments nor bailouts, but a supply-management system geared toward fair farm prices and a stable, local food supply.

Justice for Food-Chain Workers

Seven out of 10 of the worst-paying jobs in America are in the food system. We can fix that by recognizing workers’ right to organize, providing food-chain workers with hazard pay that they deserve, and securing the rights of migrant and permanent resident workers and their families to health care, food and shelter with prejudice.

This current crisis, even in its early stages, has made one thing clear: the economic stimulus aims to support every part of our flawed food, health care, economy, and our energy sector, and our food system. It is the status quo. At this point, transitioning to a more just and ethical society is not part of the plan, either as a short-term means to get past the crisis or to retool daily life into a more resilient society.

The good news is that the problems in the food system that have long been with us, as well as those we are developing due to COVID-19, can be addressed through a Green Stimulus, one that recognizes the rights of all families to a just, healthy food system. The food system is part of the fabric of modern capitalism. It can only be fixed systematically, addressing everything from the need for sustainable energy, transport and housing, to a just transition in the food system away from carbon-intensive monoculture of two crops, corn and soy, to a more sustainable, biodiverse, and agroecological farm systems.

The foundations of future farming prosperity also depend on a fair reckoning of past crimes and injustices through a commitment to reparations for black farmers and indigenous communities. One such policy is to stand up for federally backed land trust to buy land from retiring farmer that would then be sold interest-free to farmers of color. An economy of care for one another and repair for the planet, is the opportunity that the pandemic presents. As a new phase of stimulus negotiation looms, a reasonable analysis of past failures ought to prompt a food system that is more just, robust, and equitable for everyone.

When It Comes to Hunger

The Worst Is Yet to Come

By Jim Goodman, Retired Dairy Farmer and FFD Board Member

Raj Patel, Research Professor at University of Texas - Austin

Article originally published in CapTimes (Madison, WI April 14, 2020)

Good News - The Green Stimulus

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The solution to low farm prices is fair justice - farmers getting paid a fair price for producing an ethical product. Just as during the Great Depression of the 1930s, we need neither subsidy payments nor bailouts, but a supply-management system geared toward fair farm prices and a stable, local food supply.

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