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May 5, 2009

### S. 384: Global Food Security Act of 2009

The “Global Food Security Act of 2009,” or S. 384, is a bill that was recently introduced to the U.S. Senate. The purpose of S. 384 is to alleviate the problems that continue to contribute to world hunger in Africa and South Asia.

The text of the S. 384 offers a number of mechanisms that would appear to be viable long-term agricultural solutions to the problem at hand. For example, under the Title III “University Partnerships for Agriculture” policy, U.S. universities would partner up with higher education institutions in these developing countries, and with the help of U.S. funds, assist them in strengthening agricultural programs in the participating country.

However, within the wordy text of S. 384, there is one proposed solution that most readers may easily overlook without realizing the severe consequences it poses to sustainable agriculture. Under Title II of S. 384, it mandates that Section 103A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 is changed to “include research on biotechnological advances appropriate to local ecological conditions, including genetically modified technology.” Following this obscure statement, there is no subsequent discussion in regards to how research on genetically modified organisms (GMO’s) will be approached. Simply put, if S. 384 is passed, the United States government would be mandated to invest in GMO’s, such as genetically engineered seed, in any way they deem fit.

Accusations have already been made as to the motivations behind two of the creators, Republican Senator Dick Lugar and Democrat Senator Bob Casey. According to a Food First article, “Agricultural development funding under Lugar-Casey is simply more corporate welfare.

These funds will pry open markets for U.S. biotech firms, but will do little to help curb hunger.”

If this is indeed the case, there should be little incentive for the American people, especially those who enjoy the seed biodiversity that is so valued in organic farming, to allow congress to pass the bill.

But even if we assume the Lugar-Casey accusations are false and the bill is legitimately America’s best attempt to help world hunger, investing in genetically modified organisms does not seem to be the effective solution. If the United States government invests its money and effort into further research of genetically modified organisms, the goal will be to dispense the genetically engineered seed among countries in need. Therefore, it will require a large GMO producer and distributor, like Monsanto, to sell these seeds to countries. History has shown that only large farm enterprises can afford these seeds, their special fertilizer and pesticides, and everything else needed to keep these genetically programmed plants alive. With that said, we can assume that only the large farms will have the purchasing power to buy these seeds, and the small farms will subsequently be put out of business. This triggers a vicious cycle, where the synthetic fertilizers destroy the land and require farmers to purchase more products to fix the problem, thus leading to increased food prices and fewer people being able to afford their next dinner. The eventual outcome is an even wider gap between the rich and the poor, and an exacerbated world hunger situation.

Luckily, there are alternatives to investing in genetically modified organisms, and it begins with organic farming! The United Nations Environmental Programme recently completed a study in East Africa that investigated the effects of implementing organic farming regimes, and found that organic farming increased agricultural yields by 128%. In addition, it was reported that organic farming better fertilized the soil with nutrients and helped increase water retention

when compared to previous methods, which is extremely important for stressed environments like those in East Africa. This enabled the farmers to utilize natural and local resources to grow their products rather than depend on spending their limited money on materials such as synthetic fertilizer. More importantly, by applying organic methods and increasing yields, farmers were able to increase food availability to “the wider community” and reduce issues of food insecurity.

Of course, organic farming will not cure the world hunger problem by itself. Other programs, such as educating farmers on how to successfully practice sustainable agriculture or helping to improve the nations infrastructure, would also be necessary to compliment organic farming and help improve food security. However, if S. 384 were passed in its present form, big business biotechnology companies that have hurt sustainable agriculture and large farm operations would only continue to add to the food insecurity problem.

Don’t get me wrong; world hunger is a pressing issue. But as I previously stated, many people, including the Senators and Representatives who will vote on the bill, may not realize the potential domino effect that could result from mandating governmental funding into genetically modified organisms. For that reason, I suggest that you write your local congressman. Raise their awareness of the travesties they could bring upon sustainable agriculture and world hunger if they sign S. 384 in its present state, and inform them of the (proven) alternative methods available. Let them know that it is not okay to sign the bill until the proposals for Section 103A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 are revised.