

## **Brazil Alliance to Strengthen Global Food Security President's Trip Provides the Right Setting for New Collaboration**

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**P**resident Barack Obama is embarking on a historic trip to Latin America this week to strengthen U.S. ties to this vital region and commemorate the 50th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's "Alliance for Progress." The United States and Brazil should seize this opportunity to forge a strategic partnership to confront global food insecurity.

Feeding the hungry throughout the Western Hemisphere was a key priority of the original Alliance for Progress. President Kennedy declared at the launch of the alliance in 1961:

For hungry men and women cannot wait for economic discussions or diplomatic meetings; their need is urgent, and their hunger rests heavily on the conscience of their fellow men.

This remains a pressing global need today. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, or FAO, now estimates that more than 925 million people worldwide go to bed each night malnourished and hungry. Making matters worse, food prices have risen to record levels in the past eight months in a world agricultural system that is rapidly changing and under increased strain from a growing global population, changing diets, tight supplies, rising energy costs, and climate-change-induced extreme weather events affecting crop yields.

Rising food prices hit the world's poor extremely hard. The World Bank estimates that the spike in food prices since June has placed 44 million people into extreme poverty.

The good news is the United States and Brazil are well-positioned to help reverse these trends. They are the largest economies in the Western Hemisphere and they are recognized global agricultural superpowers. The United States is the largest agricultural exporter in the world and Brazil is ranked third. The two nations are also ranked number one (United States) and two (Brazil) in the production and export of soybeans, beef, and poultry, and they are major producers of corn, cotton, and pork. They both share impressive records in agricultural research and innovation.

Confronting the rise in current food prices and achieving lasting global food security will require long-term investment in developing countries' agricultural development. The United States and Brazil will also need to impart lessons learned—some good, some not-so-good—from their respective experiences increasing food production. Brazil has made remarkable progress in agriculture development in the last 40 years. Strengthening U.S.-Brazil links on food security creates an opportunity to assess and draw on Brazil's efforts in agricultural production.

Several of the methods and conditions the United States and Brazil have used are simply not practical elsewhere. Clearly, exclusive reliance on the large-scale, energy-intensive industrial agriculture model that the United States and Brazil are frequently associated with will neither be sustainable nor appropriate for boosting agricultural production in the vast majority of the world.

Nonetheless, the Brazilian experience—explained in brief in the next section—can help guide ongoing efforts to boost agricultural development in the developing world as an essential component of meeting the world's food security needs. That experience should be combined with an emphasis on meeting local agriculture needs with local knowledge, sustainable techniques, and less resource-intensive farming in developing countries.

### **Brazil's impressive agricultural success**

Brazil is in economic overdrive. The economy grew in 2010 at a rate of 7.5 percent, and Brazil is now the seventh-largest economy in the world. Brazil's growth in the agricultural sector is even more impressive. It made the successful transition from a net food importer in the 1970s to a net food exporter powerhouse. The value of Brazil's crops grew 300 percent in the last 16 years.

Brazil is nearly the physical size of the United States and it is blessed with substantial land and water resources. But the majority of its agricultural production gains in recent years have been a result of boosting yields and less a result of increased land use.

The country is undoubtedly using more land for agriculture. Land under cultivation has increased by one-third and numerous challenges remain to ensure biodiversity conservation is not overrun by agriculture and deforestation in the cerrado and Amazon regions. In general, however, agricultural production is 10 times the level of land use. Grain production in the cerrado increased 129.7 percent from 1991 to 2007 but the corresponding area cultivated increased by only 25.9 percent.

Brazil's success increasing yields is less about importing and attempting to replicate other nations' identical agricultural successes of the past. That approach rarely works. Brazil's achievements are instead more noteworthy for blending agricultural research and innovation with actual conditions on the ground.

As Brazil developed its agricultural sector, both the private and public sector dedicated resources to agricultural research and the United States provided considerable support. Brazil focused on enhancing soil quality, low-technology cross-breeding of plant varieties, and a willingness to explore innovative techniques such as no-till agriculture that results in more nutrient and carbon-rich soil.

Brazil has also made impressive commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 36 percent to 39 percent by 2020 by reducing deforestation by 80 percent in the Amazon and 40 percent in the cerrado savannah.

Brazil can put this knowledge and experience to use in helping the rest of the developing world enhance its agricultural development.

## **Ensuring global food security**

Today's rising global food prices are a harbinger of things to come. FAO experts estimate global agricultural productivity must double in 40 years to keep pace with increased demand and a projected global population of 9.1 billion in 2050.

Climate change's impact on agriculture and development in developing countries is projected to be particularly acute. More than 1 billion of the world's poor depend on agriculture for their livelihood and it is predicted that severe crop losses leading to food shortages in Africa and South Asia will happen in a much shorter timeframe than previously anticipated.

Agriculture productivity is a fundamental building block of economic development and poverty reduction in many developing countries. The United States and developed countries have neglected investment in agricultural development and small farmers in developing countries for too long. Investment in agriculture programs has shrunk to 3.5 percent of all U.S. overseas development assistance from 18 percent in 1979. Agricultural productivity growth in developing countries has dropped below 1 percent.

Greater collaboration on food security between the United States and Brazil can reverse this dangerous course.

For starters, they will need to rethink the sustainability of exporting industrial-level, energy-intensive agriculture productivity to developing countries. This approach is unlikely to meet global food security needs over the long term in a resource-constrained world. A more diverse strategy is needed.

Instead, the United States and Brazil should provide technical assistance, training, and financial incentives to developing countries to enhance food security and adapt to the destructive impacts of climate change. The two nations should focus on agricultural production that preserves the soil and water supply, promotes crop diversification, encourages local agricultural knowledge and the role of women farmers, and reduces dependence on fossil fuels and other high-cost inputs. It will be vital for the private and public sector in the United States and Brazil to fund agricultural research to increase food production yields, conserve biodiversity, and combat pests and disease in a safe and transparent manner.

The United States and Brazil are also the global leaders in the production and export of biofuels. They have a mutual interest in ensuring that future biofuels production moves forward in a sustainable manner in a world experiencing growing competition for grain and natural resources. The next generation of biofuels does have a role to play in diversifying the energy needs of the United States and Brazil and other countries. But ongoing progress will require action to ensure biofuels are done smarter and better.

The United States and Brazil should strive to produce advanced biofuels that deliver measurable lifecycle greenhouse gas reductions, use feedstocks grown sustainably or nonfood-based feedstocks, and are produced in closed containers or on semiarable land that minimizes competition with food or feed. The two countries should collaborate

immediately to leverage funding, increase private investment, coordinate trade policy, and expedite the deployment of technology to spur advanced biofuels development in developing countries.

### **Coming together**

The United States and Brazil have an opportunity and a responsibility to lead the fight against one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century: food security. Making the world more food secure is an urgent but achievable goal, and the 50th anniversary of the Alliance for Progress is a fitting moment to strengthen this joint effort.

In the medium term we can expect global food prices to remain high due to increased demand, low stocks, high oil prices, and increasing vulnerability of harvests to the impacts of climate change. The world food system must transform to meet these challenges.

An emboldened strategic partnership on food security between the United States and Brazil will require an honest assessment of conventional resource-intensive past practices. Only the best ideas that meet local needs and contribute to increasing yields and sustainable production should be deployed in developing countries.

Together, the United States and Brazil can strengthen agricultural investment and development in developing countries to meet the needs of a growing world population. Words must be turned into action.