Global Food Crisis Hits Home

Happy with your grocery bills these days? Do those gasoline pump meters seem to whir like Vegas slot machines, except you never hit the jackpot?

The two issues are not unrelated and theyre affecting pocketbooks and bellies at home and around the globe. Some Westerners might react with detached shock to stories of food riots in places like Haiti, India, and Cameroon. But when your local Costco and Sams Club start limiting rice purchases (as recently reported), reality creeps in.

Americans seem worried. A USA TODAY/Gallup poll found 73 percent of US consumers concerned about food inflation; almost half said it caused their households hardship. Eighty percent expressed concern about energy prices.{1}

Food price increases that may cause inconvenience or hardship in affluent nations can be devastating for families in the developing world. Recent food riots in Haiti cost the prime minister his job. *The New York Times* reports that spiraling prices are turning Haitian staples like beans, corn and rice into closely guarded treasures. Some Haitians eat mud patties containing oil and sugar to silence their grumbling stomachs.{2}

Silent Tsunami

Economist and special United Nations advisor Jeffrey Sachs says of the global food problem, Its the worst crisis of its kind in more than 30 years. There are a number of governments on the ropes, and I think theres more political fallout to come. {3}

The UN World Food Program says skyrocketing food prices could create a silent tsunami turning 100 million people toward

hunger and poverty. Executive director Josette Sheeran called for large-scale, high-level action by the global community. {4} British Prime minister Gordon Brown asserts, “Tackling hunger is a moral challenge to each of us and it is also a threat to the political and economic stability of nations.” {5}

World Vision, one of the worlds largest relief and development agencies, announced serious cutbacks, saying they are able to feed 1.5 million fewer people than last year. The well-respected Christian humanitarian organization appealed for international donors, citing swelling food prices and increased food need. Rising fuel costs boost fertilizer and food transportation costs. Corn diverted to make biofuels cannot become lunch,{6} though some feel biofuel is a misplaced whipping boy.{7}

Your Strategies

Of course folks in the developed world, not threatened with devastating hunger, can employ multiple strategies to stretch their resources. Careful shopping and research is one. (Holy Coupon Clipping, Batman! Just look how much we can save if we time our grocery shopping to the sales rather than our impulses!) Diet adjustment, portion control, and budgetary belt-tightening are others.

And while youre trying to be sure your outgo doesnt exceed your income lest your upkeep become your downfall—may I suggest another wise move? If possible, share some of what you have with the desperately needy. World Vision founder Bob Pierce had as his life theme, “Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.” An ancient Jewish proverb says, If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you!{8}

Many fine organizations can use your donations to effectively fight poverty and hunger. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas

Kristof says, Nobody gets more bang for the buck than missionary schools and clinics, and Christian aid groups like World Vision and Samaritan's Purse save lives at bargain-basement prices. {9} I would add World Relief and the Salvation Army to the list. Your local house of worship may be a good place to start.

As another of those ancient Jewish proverbs says, Blessed are those who help the poor. {10}

Notes

1. Sue Kirchhoff, Poll: Food costs a major worry for consumers, USA Today, April 22, 2008; at www.usatoday.com/money/economy/2008-04-22-food-costs-rise-poll_N.htm, accessed April 25, 2008.
2. Marc Lacey, Across Globe, Empty Bellies Bring Rising Anger, The New York Times, April 18, 2008; at tinyurl.com/6hhcsx, accessed April 25, 2008.
3. Ibid.
4. World Food Crisis a 'Silent Tsunami,' Agence France-Presse, The New York Times, April 23, 2008; at tinyurl.com/59asm6, accessed April 25, 2008.
5. CTV.ca News Staff, World Vision needs urgent help as millions starve, April 23, 2008; at tinyurl.com/5y4wy5.
6. Aid group to cut food ration to millions, CNN.com, April 22, 2008; at www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/04/22/food.program.cutback, accessed April 25, 2008. Editor's Note: "Page not found" error at this address while processing article. Try typing title of article into CNN.com search engine.
7. Bad policy, not biofuel, drive food prices: Merkel, Reuters, April 17, 2008; at www.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUSL1721113520080417. accessed April 25, 2008.
8. Proverbs 19:17 NLT.
9. Nicholas D. Kristof, Bush, a Friend of Africa, The New York Times, July 5, 2005; at http://tinyurl.com/y8wwoj; accessed

April 25, 2008.

10. Proverbs 14:21 NLT.

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