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DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

Should The Rockefeller Foundation Retain  
A Program In Food and Agriculture?

(Or, Is The Conquest Of Hunger Program Still Needed?)

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## I. Introduction: Three Questions

Few people who are acquainted with the activities of The Rockefeller Foundation need to be reminded that it has an international reputation in agricultural research and food production. This note examines whether there is sufficient reason for the Foundation to attempt to continue its contributions to international agriculture. It does this by seeking answers to three questions. First, should the Foundation retain the Conquest of Hunger (COH) program in food and agriculture? Second, if so, why? Third, if not, why not?

## II. Three Reasons for Retaining the Program

That the Foundation has supported work in food and agriculture for more than forty years is not a compelling justification for continuing the COH program. Yet, the Foundation's past involvement in food and agriculture has generated goodwill among the individuals and institutions working in international agriculture. This goodwill will influence the Foundation's future activities in food and agriculture because it will reduce the effort, resources, and time that Foundation staff devote to the creation of a receptive environment for any new initiative that it may wish to pursue.

We believe that the retention of the Conquest of Hunger program can be justified on at least three grounds. First, relative to other Foundation activities, the COH program offers the greatest opportunity of achieving our mandate of contributing to the well-being of mankind throughout the world. Second, there remains a need for continuing support for research into the problems of food and agriculture especially in poor

countries. Third, the staff associated with the Conquest of Hunger program have developed some new initiatives that can significantly improve the situation in food and agriculture throughout the world.

The objective of the Conquest of Hunger program is to improve the production, distribution, and consumption of food in poor countries. In a number of important ways the activities undertaken in the COH program to achieve this objective complement and even provide a rationale for the Foundation's activities in its other programs. The following examples illustrate how. While the fate of mankind probably hinges on the degree to which cordial international relations are preserved, food has proved to be a source of international tension, particularly when supplies are threatened. Therefore, from the perspective of the International Relations program the COH program is complementary. Population and food are mutually dependent. The population 'explosion' that has absorbed so much attention during recent decades could not have occurred without sustained improvements in the availability of food to a wide spectrum of the population of poor countries. Modifications of the 'explosion' in the immediate future will depend on continued improvements in the availability of food. (Indeed, population becomes less of a 'monster' or 'explosion' if the food supply increases more rapidly than the population.) Here, too, the COH program has a relevant focus.

The Foundation's program in the Arts is a civilized and civilizing initiative. Nevertheless, there is widespread medical and psychological evidence to show that hungry people are listless, apathetic, and disinterested in most aspects of their environment, including artistic endeavors.

The COH program by seeking ways to reduce these adverse effects of hunger (by improving the production, distribution, and consumption of food) is directly complementary to the Arts program. The Humanities and Contemporary Values program represents an attempt by the Foundation to help understand man- and womankind and the moral basis of their society. One issue of morality that deserves detailed examination is how the richest countries in the world can continue to consider themselves humane and moral societies while simultaneously permitting hunger, poverty, and deprivation to persist in the world. The COH program by taking positive steps to reduce the brutality of hunger and the degree of inhumanity in the world is also complementing the activities of the Humanities program.

Few people doubt that the Foundation's programs in Medical Sciences have contributed to the well-being of mankind. But, medical science alone has been only partially responsible for the improvement in health that has been experienced in poor countries over recent decades. There is a dependence between improved food intake and health which shows up as reductions in the level of morbidity, increases in life expectancy, and higher worker productivity (an important factor in reducing poverty). Viewed in this way, the Foundation's activities in medical science can only be enhanced by a continuation of the COH program's efforts to improve the availability of food in poor countries. Finally, the Social Sciences program has been promoting equal opportunity, finding solutions to the problems of (youth) unemployment, and seeking ways of improving the welfare of women in the development process. The activities of the COH program have an impact on all of these Social Science efforts.

Increasing food production among small farmers has a direct impact on employment (for youths as well as older workers) and improves the conditions of women in the rural areas. And, improving the distribution and consumption of food is as much of an equal opportunity initiative in poor countries as the focus on improving the access of minorities in the United States to education and other social amenities.

Therefore, the COH program complements the Foundation's existing programs. It amplifies the objectives of U.S.-focused programs and provides a practical manifestation of our concern for improving the welfare of mankind.

The need and potential value of a continued effort by the Foundation in food and agriculture can be demonstrated by some recent social and economic indicators for poor countries. While all indicators systematically distort aspects of 'reality,' a useful assessment of the broad dimensions of actual and emerging (aggregate) food problems can be gained from five indexes. (The number of indexes chosen is constrained by the availability of data for all poor countries - an example of a systematic distortion. At least five indexes are needed to measure dimensions of food production, income or poverty, trade in food, population, and nutritional status.) The five are: per person national income; trends in national agricultural production; trends in national population growth; an index representing changes in the supply of calories per person; and an index of changes in national food imports.

National income per person is one indicator of poverty. Many features of human existence widely interpreted as a lack of economic



development are associated with low national income per person, such as high rates of morbidity, high infant mortality, poorly developed national infrastructure - roads, health facilities, communications, and education facilities - and a high proportion of the population in low productivity agricultural (and semi-urban) employment.

Slow growth in domestic agricultural production shows that the agricultural sector has been unable to make a continuing contribution to national economic growth whether by adding to the national food supply or increasing the supply of agricultural exports.

High rates of population growth, while a partial reflection of past increases in per person food availability, aggravate national attempts in the short term to improve the access of all members of the nation to an increased supply of food.

Recent changes in the supply of calories per person is a composite index of the effects of changes in the national food supply through domestic production and imports and changes in population. While the average supply of calories disguises the (often) highly distorted per person distribution of calories, there is little evidence to show that these distributions have changed significantly in all but a few countries over recent decades. (The People's Republic of China and Sri Lanka are exceptions.) Hence, a decline in the per person calorie supply is a reasonable indicator that the supply of calories to the poorest members of each society has also declined.

Finally, recent changes in the national level of food imports is an index of the joint effects of slow growth rates of domestic food

production, high population growth rates (and depending on the types of food imported) changes in the growth rates of income of specific groups of the population, e.g., urban dwellers or the rich. But, more importantly, rapid increases in food imports represent a diversion of the country's scarce foreign exchange (whether earned through exports, or borrowed) from the purchase of imports to increase national productive capacity and improve social infrastructure.

Deterioration in any one of these indexes means some sort of economic and social difficulties for some group in the particular country where it occurs. But, in most cases a deterioration in one index can be compensated by improvements in others. For example, a decline in agricultural production can be offset to some degree if the industrial, mining and other sectors of the economy are growing rapidly, expanding their exports or substituting for imports. However, there is a group of poor countries concentrated in East Africa, West Africa, and South Asia that has experienced a deterioration in all of these indicators over the last decade. For this group at least the problems and difficulties of food are becoming increasingly critical. Therefore, there is no justification on the basis of need for phasing out the COH program.

The third reason for continuing the COH program is the potential significance of the new initiatives that have been developed (or are in the process of being developed) by the Foundation staff. Three are worth noting. The first is a redirection in our support for international agricultural research. This effort will have two dimensions. One is to identify highly motivated individuals who have a direct link with the



national agricultural research system in their respective countries and provide fellowship support to develop their potential as scientific leaders. This will be done through joint training and research programs which link university training with doctoral research at the IARC's. The object is to promote closer integration of the national programs with the International Centers and improve the degree of cooperation in the international agricultural research system. The second dimension relates to the direct support for basic agricultural research at or linked to the Centers on problems that will further the objectives of the COH program. Two examples are research support to integrate new advances in plant genetic engineering with conventional breeding techniques, and to help the People's Republic of China establish a national system for the collection, evaluation, and storage of plant genetic resources. To complement this latter effort members of our staff are currently developing the theoretical framework for the efficient management of genetic resources. In addition, we shall be providing advanced degree training to selected individuals from the PRC so that they will be able to operate and manage the genetic program more effectively.

The second initiative is the Marginal Lands and Fragile Environments program. It has begun modestly by helping to promote the closer cooperation of individuals and institutions working on the problems of the steep-sloped areas of tropical America and by supporting the coordinated research into the technical agricultural problems of the lowland humid tropics. Our initial focus will be the Amazon basin working with the national agricultural research organizations of five countries, Brazil,

Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela, and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture and the International Potato Center. At a later date the lessons learned will be tested for their applicability to the lowland humid tropical areas of Southeast Asia, particularly the Outer Islands of Indonesia.

The third initiative is in Food and Agricultural Policy. It has the objective of improving the production, distribution, and consumption of food in selected poor countries by improving the capacity of some of their personnel to identify, analyze, and formulate ways for acting upon the main food problems, and linking these personnel with the people who make food policy. This activity is a response to the common observation that many food problems are not technical problems but policy problems. The Foundation, as an international philanthropic institution with a reputation in international agriculture, has a special ability to promote such a program, demonstrate its effectiveness, and engage other institutions (e.g., the Agricultural Development Council) in the effort.

### III. Three Reasons for Not Retaining the Program

A decision to phase out the COH program should not be based on the perception that the Foundation has been in international agriculture for more than forty years and it is now time to "move on to other areas." It may be the time to move on but the reasons ought to be more substantial than that we have in some sense "done enough for long enough."

In our view, there are three reasons why the Foundation might wish to phase out the COH program: the high expenditures now required to make a

a 'significant' impact in international agricultural affairs; a philosophy not to continue long-term involvements in specific programs; the requirement that the Foundation devote more attention to domestic issues because of the recent decline in U.S. Government support for a wide range of activities.

The COH budget is approximately \$7.5 million. It has been declining in 'real' terms (i.e., in terms of number and type of activities that can be supported) for the last several years. Our activities no longer have the absolute or relative impact on international agriculture that they had in the decades of the fifties and sixties. Given the expansion of general support for international agricultural research and development over the last two decades (e.g., from the World Bank and national aid programs) the Foundation's financial contribution has diminished to the point of relative insignificance. Does the Foundation have other attributes - skills, flexibility, entrepreneurship - which enable it to make a 'significant' impact on the problems of food and agriculture in poor countries? If yes, is this impact 'significant enough' relative to other opportunities for using the Foundation's resources? If no, the COH program has become too expensive for the Foundation to maintain.

One of the original justifications for establishing The Rockefeller Foundation was that it offered the opportunity for a relatively independent institution with sufficient resources to support activities that could not or did not receive support from other sources. These activities were often risky, unconventional, or simply good ideas that had been overlooked. The

philosophy, or guiding principle, in providing support to these activities was that it should be phased out as other sources of funding become available. If this principle is adhered to (as in the case of, e.g., QE and EFD and specific activities within COH itself such as support for nitrogen fixation) then the COH program should be phased out. Many other institutions are now concerned with the problems of food and agriculture in poor countries, and the flow of financial resources to give practical effect to this concern has increased dramatically, especially since the mid-1950's. The COH program has supported successful initiatives that others judge as worthwhile and worth supporting. The most obvious example is the International Agricultural Research Center system and the support it receives through the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research.

The COH program has been a successful example of the Foundation's philosophy of supporting innovative activities. Should it be phased out now that others have taken over and extended these activities in food and agriculture? Is the COH program so important that the operating philosophy of the Foundation should be compromised, particularly if doing this means missing the opportunity to support other activities that contribute to the well-being of mankind around the world?

The unprecedented peacetime shift in national priorities toward defense and away from both social expenditures and proportional taxation have increased the probability of civil disorder in the United States. The relatively drastic redistribution of income and wealth now set in motion will serve to increase the internal threat to the "national security" of the United States relative to the external. It seems to us that this foundation

should be concerned about threats to the integrity of the United States as a nation from whatever source. To this end, the Foundation could divert the resources now being devoted to the COH and possibly other programs to a detailed analysis of the directions in which U.S. society is heading and to establish procedures for examining the issue in all its ramifications. Apart from this initiative, the Foundation could seek ways in which the people who have fallen or are about to fall through the vaunted "social safety net" can be identified and helped. Filling the new jails with these people is not a suitable answer. This foundation with its reputation, flexibility, and resources could make an important contribution to the well-being of the majority of Americans by helping to place the relations among poverty, welfare, Administration actions and social obligations on a different basis than they are at present.

#### IV. Assessment

There are good reasons both for and against Foundation retaining a program in food and agriculture. Relative to other activities in the Foundation, the COH program has a legitimate and justifiable claim to a share of the Foundation's resources, yet there are other issues, particularly in the U.S. that require serious attention. While the Foundation has always phased out programs that others have begun to support, within the COH program there are a number of potentially important activities (e.g., ICLARM) that can contribute to the well-being of mankind but for which few other institutions yet have provided support. Despite all of the other agencies in international agriculture, sharply focused COH activities



still can make a unique contribution in poor countries and perhaps also at key leverage points in basic agricultural research oriented toward the poor country problems.

Overall, we believe that the Foundation should retain the COH program so long as its activities continually change to support initiatives in food and agriculture that are innovative and that other institutions have not begun to support. Food will continue to be one of mankind's major problems for the foreseeable future if only because man has not yet reached the state of civilization in which hunger and deprivation are viewed by all people as dehumanizing and barbarous threats to civilization itself.