



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## **Targeting Gaps in the Food Supply Chain: Going Beyond Agricultural Production to Achieve Food Security**

*Worldwatch's Nourishing the Planet team highlights innovations in information technology, market access, and communication that improve livelihoods and food security.*

**Washington, D.C.**—Agricultural production is only the first step in moving the world's food from farm to fork, according to Nourishing the Planet, a project of the Worldwatch Institute. The other links in the food chain—harvesting, packaging, storing, transporting, marketing, and selling—ensure that food actually reaches consumers. Inefficiencies in these activities, rather than just low yields or poor farming techniques, are often to blame for food shortages and low prices for growers.

“Many of the farms and organizations we visited in Africa seemed to have the most success reducing hunger and poverty through efforts that had little to do with producing more crops,” said Nourishing the Planet director Danielle Nierenberg, who spent two years traveling across sub-Saharan Africa researching food chains in over 25 countries.

With the United Nations projecting a global population of more than 9 billion by 2050, increasing food chain efficiency will become ever more essential. Producers and consumers must be part of a food chain that feeds the world, provides fair prices to farmers, and works in harmony with the environment. “When groups of small farmers better organize their means of production—whether ordering the right inputs at the right time or selling their crops directly to customers—they become more resilient to fluctuations in global food prices while also better serving local communities,” said Robert Engelman, Executive Director of Worldwatch.

Nourishing the Planet ([www.NourishingthePlanet.org](http://www.NourishingthePlanet.org)) is a two-year evaluation of environmentally sustainable agricultural innovations to alleviate hunger and poverty. Worldwatch researchers traveled to 25 countries across sub-Saharan Africa to meet with more than 350 farmers groups, NGOs, government agencies, and scientists, highlighting small-scale agricultural efforts that are helping to improve peoples' livelihoods by providing them with food and income. The findings are documented in the recently released report, *State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet*.

In *State of the World 2011*, contributing author Samuel Fromartz uses the example of corn production in Zambia to illustrate how off-farm inefficiencies exacerbate food insecurity and poverty. Poor market access, unpredictable weather patterns, and insufficient infrastructure make small-scale agriculture a high-risk livelihood. Seasons of surplus corn production can be as detrimental as low-yielding ones. Large surpluses saturate local markets, and local farmers have no alternatives for selling their product. “Many do not have the luxury of picking when to sell or whom to sell to; they are desperate and need to sell to eat. So they take whatever price they can get,” writes Fromartz.

Research done by Nourishing the Planet staff has found innovations in sub-Saharan Africa and other locations around the globe that improve market access, enhance farmer-to-farmer communication, and harness simple information technology. These improvements in the food chain provide farmers with fair prices and also help increase food security by distributing food efficiently.

Nourishing the Planet recommends three ways that agriculture is helping to address gaps in the current food supply chain:

- ***Coordinating farmers.*** In Uganda, the organization Technoserve works with farmers to improve market conditions for sales of bananas. Technoserve helps individuals form business groups that receive technical advice and enter into sales collectively. Coordinating business has decreased transaction costs and helped farmers market their crops and compete with larger producers more effectively. Over 20,000 farmers now participate in the project. Farmers in the United States are also banding together to increase sales efficiency and fair prices. The Chesapeake Bay region’s FRESHFARM Markets act as an organizational umbrella under which area farmers can coordinate, market, and sell their products.
- ***Increasing market transparency.*** In Nairobi, Kenya, the DrumNet project uses simple communication technology to provide farmers with real-time market information. Having access to market prices and sale-coordination opportunities allows farmers to receive fair prices for their crops. And the transparency increases overall sales transactions, meaning that less food goes to waste.
- ***Using low-cost technology to boost efficiency.*** According to the UN, over 5 billion people on the planet now have a mobile phone subscription. As the cost of the technology drops, using the devices beyond personal communication makes sense. In Niger, farmers use mobile phones to access market information, an application that has reduced the fluctuation in regional grain prices by 20 percent and has helped ensure fair prices for producers and consumers. Similarly, the Grameen Foundation and Google have collaborated to develop Google Trader, an online bulletin board on which farmers and merchants can contact one another. The bulletin also includes applications such as “Farmer’s Friend” a tool that offers farmers information on weather, pests, and livestock management.

*State of the World 2011* is accompanied by informational materials including briefing documents, summaries, an innovations database, videos, and podcasts, all available at [www.NourishingthePlanet.org](http://www.NourishingthePlanet.org). The project’s findings are being disseminated to a wide range of

agricultural stakeholders, including government ministries, agricultural policymakers, and farmer and community networks, as well as the increasingly influential nongovernmental environmental and development communities.

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**Notes to Editors:**

**For review copies of *State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet***

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