

Congresswoman Eva M. Clayton (Retired)
177 Northside Drive
Littleton, North Carolina 27850

April 29, 2008

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Members of Congress:

I write this open letter to you today as a former colleague disheartened at the increasing global food crisis and its impact both at home and abroad. As the global food crisis worsens food insecurity likewise increases. This condition is made even worse by the "perfect storm" of escalating fuel prices coupled with the increased use of grains for fuel rather than food. This is a most urgent situation requiring our immediate attention if worldwide calamity is to be avoided.

In the United States, we have more than 35 million people experienced hunger or the risk of hunger in 2007. This number includes more than 12 million children. Many of these people are not served by any of the governmental safety net programs or any of the private food charities. Recently, it was reported on National Public Radio that the American Second Harvest' Food Bank Network around the country were seeing many more new faces, including people with jobs and not on public assistance seeking food assistance. The increases in demand for help come as the Food Banks in North Carolina and elsewhere are experiencing food shortages.

During a recent visit to my supermarket I was engaged in conversation by a mother shopping for groceries for her family. She noted that even the lesser cuts of meats were beyond her family's budget forcing them to often do without. The combinations of high food and fuel prices along with the weakened economy have combined to exact a tremendous toll on the poor and middle class alike.

This international food instability is occurring at a time when Congress is still finalizing the "Farm Bill." This proposed legislation will provide an expanded Food Stamps program and other international food relief programs'. The urgency of its passage cannot be overemphasized. As the only comprehensive food safety net program, the Food Stamp Program must be approved and expanded if we are to address the challenges posed by national and international food insecurity. If the Food stamp program is not approved and expanded to meet the current crisis; we will fail millions of people who need assistance now. Evidence of the global impact of food insecurity is seen in the many countries in Africa and Asia where food riots have broken out. Recently, the Prime Minister of Haiti resigned, in large part, because of the nationwide food shortages that the county has experienced. The UN's Food Agriculture Organization reported that in 2007 that more than 16 thousand children die each day from hunger related causes. That these conditions can occur in a world with an abundance of food is a moral disgrace. If we sit idly by and take no action then we are all to blame.

Congresswoman Eva Clayton served in the United States Congress from 1993-2003 and represented North Carolina's First Congressional District. Following her retirement, she served for three years as the Assistant Director General of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

“A silent tsunami which knows no border” is how the head of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) describes the global food shortages which threaten to plunge more than 100 million people on every continent into hunger. In an effort to address this challenge, World Bank’s President, Robert Zoellick has urged the swift passage of a \$600 million initiative from donor governments for food relief.

The needs, however, continue. They are both urgent and unrelenting. We must provide immediate funding for food. We must also provide immediate funding for investment in people’s capacity; providing them with the tools to be producers of their own food. Resources for agriculture investment both technical and financial are needed for; seeds, fertilizer, improved farming practices, and establish food safety net programs in the poorest countries in Africa and Asia where hunger and poverty is the highest. Every opportunity should be made to increase small farming production in these countries. This allows a more sustainable and cheaper method of addressing world hunger and poverty when both the emergency food relief and agriculture needs are considered together.

The UN Food Agencies must continue to assist member countries in strengthening and protecting their agriculture systems. They must bring their collective missions and technical capabilities together to collectively collaborate with other organizations in their response to this crisis.

Hopefully, you and your colleagues in Congress will take the immediate opportunity to pass the “Farm Bill” which improves the Food Stamp Program, provides assistance for Food Banks, and includes global school feeding for children. The immediate approval of the \$600 million allocation for emergency food relief in the pending “Supplementary Spending Bill” must also be passed. When Congress considers appropriations for Department of State and Foreign Operations, you should give priority consideration to the pressing needs for investment in agriculture development in the poorest countries to enable people to grow food and feed their families.

Thank you for consideration and action on these urgent humanitarian issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eva Clayton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eva Clayton
Former Congresswoman and Assistant Director General
UN Food Agriculture Organization