

Statement by
Rep. Jo Ann Emerson
Member of Congress
before the
Subcommittee on Specialty Crops,
Rural Development and Foreign Agriculture

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear here today and discuss the George McGovern - Robert Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program.

I would like to stress that there is a clear need for the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. There are 300 million school aged, children around the world who suffer from hunger. Of these children, an estimated 120 million do not attend school. Food for Education is just what it sounds like: a unique program to simultaneously improve nutrition and education by providing students with a nutritious meal or take home rations. The McGovern-Dole Program, ably administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, donates agriculture commodities and provides financial and technical assistance to governments, intergovernmental organizations, and PVOs, who do a wonderful job identifying and reaching out to those in need.

While schools are an excellent location for reaching hungry students, they are more than merely a way to ensure school-age children receive nutritional assistance. By providing assistance through schools, the McGovern-Dole program increases enrollment, increases the students' ability to learn and, ultimately, increases the opportunities available to our greatest resources - children.

Mr. Chairman, we know hunger affects learning. Hungry students often do not

attend school, they are needed at home to help produce food or earn money to purchase it. Those hungry individuals who do make it to school often have trouble concentrating on lessons if they are hungry. Learning, conversely, has an opposite effect on hunger. Education allows children to acquire the skills needed to address hunger at their young stage of life and in the future. School attendance brings a desire to learn and openness to new ideas. Studies have also shown that as enrollment increases for girls, stunting in children under 5 years old decreases. Among the McGovern-Dole Program's greatest successes has been increasing school enrollment among girls.

If these reasons alone did not make a compelling argument for the McGovern-Dole program, it is also widely recognized that such programs add to our national security. At present there are 12,000 madrassas in Pakistan. These madrassas provide free food and lodging to students; however, a few also get involved in militancy and, ultimately, terrorism. But the question Pervez Musharraf is left with is, "who else can provide food for these children?"

This legislation, quite frankly, is a win-win for the American people, and it is a win-win for children all over the world who desperately need food assistance and an education. We all know, very well, that our country is currently engaged in daily battles with individuals who want to harm Americans. However, we are also engaged in daily battles for the hearts and minds of the "man on the street" in under-developed countries. In this battle, the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition program holds great potential.

These are the reasons the McGovern-Dole Program is needed, however, the support for this program is not just based on need; it is also based on results. For FY

2006 the McGovern Dole Program has exceeded USDA goals for the number of children receiving daily meals or take-home rations. The McGovern-Dole Program was initiated in 2000 as a \$300 million pilot program, the Global Food for Education Initiative. From 2001 to 2003 the GFEI fed nearly 7 million children through 48 projects in 38 countries. During the 2002 farm bill reauthorization process, the GFEI was established as a permanent program and renamed to honor Senator George McGovern and Senator Robert Dole.

The renamed program, however, immediately experienced a funding decline from the \$300 million provided for the pilot program. H.R. 1616, legislation introduced by Mr. McGovern and me, which now has 109 other bipartisan cosponsors, would return us to the \$300 million mark in FY 2012.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention the dedication and commitment of former Senators McGovern and Dole. These distinguished leaders have been eloquent advocates for ending hunger and have provided nudges of conscience reminding us in government of our moral responsibility as a country rich in natural resources and an abundant, safe food supply to help people who cannot help themselves.

Another of the successes inherent in this program is the requirement of graduation. When USDA enters into an agreement with an eligible organization to provide food aid assistance in schools, the agreement must include provisions to continue the benefits to education and nutrition after the commodities stop flowing from USDA. By providing a mandatory funding source Congress could ensure a more reliable funding stream, sending a message of strong, continuing support to beneficiaries in need and to partner governments and organizations that our commitment is real. I believe this, more

stable funding, would also allow USDA to increase the number of multi-year commitments made.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, the McGovern Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program reflects the humanitarian values Americans share. It reflects the value Americans place on an education – regardless of sex or race. The program utilizes American resources, benefits the American economy, and it makes us safer from the enemies of the American people who hope their message of intolerant hatred fuels a self-fulfilling response from our great nation. As this Committee moves forward with the important work of drafting a farm bill, I hope you will give every consideration to reauthorizing this important program and expanding it. Thank you.