A leaked World Bank confidential report, along with numerous other studies, contradicts the United States (US) government’s claim that biofuels have played a minimal role in the current global food crisis.

Over the past four years, according to The Guardian, the global production of biofuels has increased from 8 million gallons to 18 million gallons, while food price inflation has increased by at least 220 percent.

The evidence has many people pointing fingers at biofuel production as a link to the global food crisis.

Edward P. Lazear, White House Council of Economics Advisor, spoke in May of this year on behalf of the Bush administration, assuring reporters that ethanol was responsible for only three percent of recent increases in global food prices. A month later, Ed Scafer, US Secretary of Agriculture, publicly announced that the production of biofuels was only a minor factor in the world’s escalating food crisis.

Despite such political persistence about role of biofuels in the food crisis, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) conducted research based upon their global agricultural commodity supply and utilization model, which is considered to be extremely reliable by the anti-hunger community. The results of their study estimated that biofuels had at least an overall 30-percent effect on rising prices for all major grain products.

Another source—a confidential, unpublished report conducted by the World Bank and obtained by The Guardian—also contradicts the US government’s statements about biofuel. This report suggests that biofuels have forced global food price increases by 75 percent.

The World Bank report lists different ways that researchers believe biofuels have affected global food markets. According to their records, more than a third of US corn is now used to produce ethanol, and about half of vegetable oils from European Union countries (EU) goes towards the production of biodiesel.

The report also mentions that farmers have been asked to set aside land for the sole purpose of biofuel production, causing a decrease in land used for grain and other crop production that many developing and underdeveloped countries depend on.

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Biofuels and Food Security
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According to the World Bank study, underdeveloped and developing countries are not only suffering the worst from the global food crisis, but they are also being blamed for the hunger situation.

US President George W. Bush has connected the increase in food prices not to biofuel, but to higher food demands from India and China.

These allegations are contradicted in the World Bank report, which suggests that developing countries have had no major influence on the increase of food prices.

Aditya Chakrabortty, author of “Secret Report: Biofuel Caused Food Crisis; Internal World Bank Study Delivers Blow to Plant Energy Drive” (The Guardian), suggested that the US and European political leaders are keeping information regarding biofuels low-key and out of the public eye because biofuels have caused such a distortion among food prices.

Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank, publicly stated that the global food crisis seriously affects poor and rural areas, where the majority of people spend at least 70 percent of their income on food.

The drastic inflation of food costs, especially over the past six months, has caused a number of political confrontations and protests in more than 15 developing countries—many of them resulting in riots.

Recent reports from the United Nations (UN) estimated that more than 100 million people worldwide suffer from hunger and poverty. The World Bank study estimated that biofuel is responsible for a minimum of 30 million of those people.

The IFPRI model shows that, in 2008, more than 2 million children under the age of 5 in developing countries were malnourished because of a major decrease in the use of food crops for food. These crops had been replaced by biofuel production.

Benjamin Senauer, along with several colleagues, has conducted research on biofuel effects. In “The Appetite for Biofuel Starves the Poor” (The Guardian), his group concluded that—in addition to the 2 million children around the world already profoundly affected by malnutrition—390,000 children will also die within the same year, due to the rapid increase in prices for food caused by biofuels alone.

According to another report published by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the largest charity in the world, the current global food crisis has turned into a long-term epidemic. This report predicted that food prices, in the US alone, will keep increasing until 2009 and won’t become stable again until at least 2015.

Senauer also implies in his article that the biofuels policy must be re-examined and dealt with soon by US leadership. At press time, the US presidential election was drawing near. Many anti-hunger advocates are urging both candidates for presidency to address hunger and poverty issues, food security and particularly the role of biofuels in the world’s food supplies.

—Amanda Ochoa is a journalism student at Baylor University. Sources: The Guardian, UN World Food Programme, UN Food and Agricultural Organisation, International Food Policy Research Institute and Catholic Relief Services.

—The art on pages 1 and 2 is by Sylvia Stockton.

Hunger
by Emily Benton

That pain, that tugging,
So achingly familiar.
Another sunrise, another sunset,
Another empty belly.

I have a false idea in my head
Of what hunger feels like.
The pretty, sad girl
on my television,
The beautiful eyes in the magazine.
But I know it’s deeper than that.
It is torment we have not tasted before.
It is suffering we have not seen.
It is an emptiness we have never felt.

I knowingly am blessed,
And am ashamed of that little girl’s face.
Am I haunted by my blessing—
By that pain I’ve never had?

That pain, that tugging,
So achingly familiar.
Another sunrise, another sunset,
Another empty belly.

—Emily Benton, a native of Little Rock, Arkansas, is an English student at Baylor University and a Seeds of Hope intern.
Waco, TX—Beginning in the early 1990s, Lake Shore Baptist Church (LSBC) in Waco, Texas, was considering how to help the local food bank during times when stores in the warehouse were depleted.

David Hendon, the chair of LSBC’s missions committee that year, came up with a new idea. Instead of asking members to bring a few cans of food, he suggested that they donate a whole case.

Organizers always try to find the best prices for the food they buy, partly because it simply makes sense, and partly to honor the memory of two of the first participants.

Jack and Kay Hansma, both now deceased, were committed all of their lives to combating hunger. They lived frugally and gave away most of their income. They worked diligently to collect food for the ACAH.

“When we began A Case against Hunger, Jack would get angry unless we got the best price so that we could maximize the volume of food going to Caritas. So he would drive all over Waco to find discount prices on canned goods,” Hendon said.

Brister and Hendon have found that it is important to stack the food in a place that can be seen by the most people. The church staff monitors the selling of the cases. Checks can be made out to the church, which makes it tax deductible. The cases are marked “sold” as money comes in, so people can see how much still needs to be purchased.

The food goes to Caritas of Waco, an emergency-assistance agency that houses one of the largest food pantries in Texas. Caritas executive director Kenneth Moerbe said the donations from LSBC are extremely helpful, especially since they come at a time of year when most people are not thinking about food drives.

Hendon tries to stress the necessity for nutritious, high-protein food. “Bulk items such as rice and beans are good, but usually the greatest need at food banks is for things such as canned meats or fish. They cost a bit more, but they meet a need in shaping a balanced diet for the recipients,” he said.

Brister believes that this program will continue to exist and grow. Workers at Caritas and the ever-growing number of McLennan County folks in need certainly hope so.

—Laura Sorrell, a native of Lufkin, Texas, is a journalism student at Baylor University.

What one church can do

A ‘Case’ Against Hunger

by Laura Sorrell

That’s how “A Case Against Hunger” (ACAH) was born. The church purchases cases of food in bulk from a local grocery store and stacks them in the foyer outside the sanctuary.

“We like being able to provide products at varied prices, including 50-cent boxes of mac and cheese that children buy, and cases that cost from $8 to $30,” Annette Brister, another organizer of the project, said.

The only theology worth doing is that which inspires and transforms lives, that which empowers us to participate in creating, liberating and blessing the world.

—Carter Heyward
Looking at my half-eaten plate of food, I felt a sour chord being struck in my spirit that had never sounded before. The spaghetti, still lukewarm, was calling out for someone to consume it, while the not-even-touched salad stared back at me as if I had just turned it down for a prom date.

Finally the churning in my spirit found its source of unrest. Every spoonful I leave is like one stomach unfed.

This realization haunts me—that beautiful people across the expanse of this globe go each day lacking one of life’s necessities: food.

Take Malawi for instance. Ranked 164 out of 177 on the Human Development index, it is among the most impoverished nations on the planet.

With 86 percent of its citizens living in rural areas, lacking access to public health systems or educational services, one of its most prominent problems is the networking of its resources. Agriculture is a thriving industry in Malawi but its staple crops won’t solve any sort of hunger crisis. According a World Report from the US Central Intelligence Agency, Malawi’s export industry consists mostly of tobacco products, and a surprisingly low amount of maize. The country is also in the middle of a water shortage crisis.

With the majority of their harvests being shipped overseas or trucked to other nations in order to keep the economy afloat, it is uncertain how Malawi will pull out of this economic and developmental tailspin. Yet thousands of people go without vital nourishment every day.

The United Nations (UN) World Food Programme has committed to allocating just over US$24 million to help Malawi’s people find food security. And the saddest truth is that Malawi isn’t alone.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation says that 865 million people worldwide go daily without being afforded their most simple need.

Will I always clean my plate of every last scrap of food? No. Will I always feel a Tsunami of guilt sweep over me every time I scrape bits of food off into the trash can? No. Will I remember the blessing I have, and the people around the world who don’t get to enjoy them as I do? Always.

These people will forever be etched on the cave walls of my heart—as a reminder to me to live life not only for myself, but also for the forgotten and overlooked.

—Charlie Boyd is a Baylor University business student from Horseshoe Bay, Texas. Sources: UN World Food Programme, UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and US Central Intelligence Agency.

The food pantry has always been communion: a Great Thanksgiving for a great love. It’s embodied the glorious, disturbing reality at the very center of our church: Jesus’ Table, where all are welcomed without exception. If we stand together at that Table and receive the next new thing God is making for us and through us, what will happen?

—Sara Miles, in Take This Bread, relates how she and others founded a food pantry in her San Francisco church, literally distributing food off of the altar table.
Trade Week of Action: Right to Food Guide

Published by the Presbyterian Hunger Program in August 2008, this revised booklet introduces the Trade Week of Action on the Right to Food at a time when food prices are pushing millions more into poverty.

The guide explores the interactions between trade, agriculture, food and human rights. It considers what the Bible has to say about trade and food, and tells the stories of real people affected by free trade policies. The guide offers action ideas, liturgy and other worship resources. To download, go to www.pcusa.org/trade/resources.htm.

Free Resources from Seeds of Hope

You can now access ten years’ worth of *Sacred Seasons* worship packets, free of charge, at the Seeds of Hope Publishers web site. All of the back issues for Lent, Advent and Hunger Emphasis are posted in pdf form for your use. You can also find there a number of other free resources:

- **Developing a Heart for the Hungry: a Hunger Emphasis Primer for Beginning Churches**,
- Two collections sponsored by the Alliance of Baptists:
  - *Speaking of Hunger: Sermons of Challenge and Hope* and
  - *Hope Is in Our Hands: Lessons & Activities about Hunger for Children & Youth* and
- Several Peace Sunday services sponsored by the International Ministries division of the American Baptist Church.

To find these, go to www.seedspublishers.org and click on “Worship Resources.”

...now available free of charge at www.seedspublishers.org
LOS ANGELES, CA—Tens of thousands of children in the US are considered food-insecure, which means they are likely to miss two or more meals during a week because they come from an impoverished household.

About a year ago, former Disney star and actress Hilary Duff decided to do something about that. She became involved with a program that gives school children food for the weekend.

The program, called Blessings in a Backpack (BIAB), provides students with an extra backpack full of nutritious food to take home on Friday afternoons. Each backpack contains enough meals to last each child through the weekend and is completely free of charge. Duff sponsors backpacks for 1100 children in the Los Angeles area.

BIAB began in Louisville, KY, three years ago, when school officials noticed that many children were coming to school on Monday hungrier than normal. The children look forward to the two meals a day they receive at school because it is the only nutritious food many children get a chance to eat. For low-income families, a nutritious dinner can sometimes be hard for parents to put together.

Duff began last year with Normandie Avenue Elementary School in Los Angeles, CA. She agreed to foot the bill for the backpacks and the food. A group of volunteers, mainly a fifth grade class, prepared the bags each week.

A CBS News report said the parents of those students remarked that participating in the program teaches the children about both giving and receiving.

The report also said that Hilary Duff’s name and face behind the program kept children from the fear of being ridiculed. Also, every student at Normandie Elementary was required to take home a backpack, so no one was singled out.

Duff now sponsors backpacks for 1,100 children in the Los Angeles area.

In addition to Los Angeles, the national program reaches schools in Louisville, Warsaw and Eminence, KY; Fort Wayne and New Albany, IN; Manhattan, NY; Boca Rotan and Orlando, FL and St. Louis, MO—with new participants planned in four more states.

In most of these places, the backpacks are available for students who participate in the Federal free and reduced lunch programs. The program’s goals are to raise awareness about child hunger, help to meet the nutritional needs of children and to eventually be available for all 50 states. Their slogan is, “Because hunger…doesn’t take a break on weekends.”

In October of this year, Duff appeared at the Roberto Clemente Elementary School in New York City’s East Village to celebrate a new BIAB program partly sponsored by Nina Footwear.

CEO Scott Silverstein said that, when Nina moved to the East Village last year, they looked for a charity in the neighborhood in which employees could get personally involved. Nina employees filled the backpacks each week. The project was such a success that the company decided to continue into the current school year.

Teachers know that working on an empty stomach does not help test scores, because it is hard to think. Nutrition statistics and studies in schools have borne this out many times. But some families just do not have the resources to fully feed their children ANY foods, let alone “brain food.”

Since Blessings in a Backpack began, student attendance and grades have improved in these schools, and tardiness has declined. Parents are also showing more involvement in school activities.

—CBS News, Blessings in a Backpack
(www.blessingsinabackpack.com)

The news stories on pages 6-7 were compiled by Katherine Ramirez. Katherine works with special-needs children through an Americorps program in San Antonio, Texas.
DILI, TIMOR-LESTE—According to the US Department of State, East Timor, the first country formed in the new millennium, is one of the world’s poorest countries.

Having been subjugated by Portugal since the 15th Century, East Timor—officially known as Timor-Leste—was annexed to Indonesia in 1975. They began struggling for independence in 1999, but did not gain it until 2002, when the United Nations (UN) officially recognized the country.

According to the World Food Programme, more than one-third of the population regularly experiences food shortages. Food insecurity is extensive due to low crop yields, lack of income, drought, underdeveloped markets, and civil unrest.

The already-meager infrastructure was destroyed by the Indonesian militaries in 1999—which left the economy, primarily made up of subsistence farming and fishing, in shambles.

East Timor’s offshore gas and oil reserves promised the only real hope for lifting it out of poverty, but a dispute with Australia over the rights to the oil reserves in the East Timor Sea has, so far, thwarted those efforts.

A nongovernmental organization called Network for Good says that one-third of the population of Timor-Leste was killed between 1975 and 2002—with two-thirds more displaced. This all happened during the continued occupation by the Indonesian military after the country was declared to be independent by the UN. Since 2002, the embattled population—about one million people—has labored to rebuild the country, under the protective watch of the UN.

Timor-Leste holds the record for highest malnutrition rates in Asia; half of the country’s population lives on less than 55 cents a day. The majority of the nation is also illiterate. The people do not have the resources to educate themselves.

Timor-Leste has supposedly received more donor funds than many other nations; yet some of the people are still starving.

The government’s National Disaster Management Office has warned against overreaction, insisting that Timor-Leste is not experiencing starvation and hunger issues like those in Ethiopia and Sudan, but that they are instead experiencing a “Food Shortage.” Yet the lack of food is such a common problem that the months of November to March have come to be known as the “hungry season.”

—from the United States Department of State, the UN World Food Programme, and ZNet, a web site for Z Communications.

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Christ in Disguise

At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received how much money we have made how many great things we have done. We will be judged by

“I was hungry and you gave me to eat I was naked and you clothed me I was homeless and you took me in.”

Hungry not only for bread— but hungry for love
Naked not only for clothing— but naked of human dignity and respect Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks— but homeless because of rejection.

This is Christ in distressing disguise.

—Mother Teresa of Calcutta
As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share.

—1 Timothy 6:17-18

Trouble and weeping and fear and ruin come when people forget the promises of God that bind us to each other—the hungry to the overfed, the innocent to the cynical, the triumphant to the brokenhearted. All over God’s round earth, trouble comes when the people forget the promise. And God is far away.

So we try to help each other remember the promises which are our way and our truth and our life. We try to help each other stop expecting faith to be soothing. We stop trying to mostly entertain each other in church and instead help each other find faith that will deepen into sacrificial love.

—Martha Sterne

If fair trade is alternative trade, and renewable energy is alternative energy, and sustainable agriculture is alternative agriculture, does that make compassion alternative behavior and honesty alternative speech? We know things have gotten out of balance when what should be the norm is considered progressive and revolutionary.

—Peter Schweitzer, Plenty USA

“It’s easier,” Charlotte replied frankly, “and often more emotionally satisfying to be mortally offended on behalf of your God than to serve God by altering one’s style and manner of life—and in a short space, it is certainly much more comfortable. One can feel righteous, very much one who belongs, while heaping vengeance on the heads of sinners. It costs a lot less than giving time or money to the poor.”

—Anne Perry, Farrier’s Lane, a Victorian mystery

O God of abundance, you feed us every day. Rise in us now, make us into your bread, that we may share your gifts with a hungry world, and join in love with all people, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—from the morning prayer at the food pantry at St. Gregory’s Episcopal Church in San Francisco. From Take This Bread a book by Sara Miles.