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Finding Solutions Newsletter

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THE FOOD CHALLENGE: A BIG CHALLENGE FOR KIDS...

By JAN SCHROCK

Grab and Go. That's how most of us eat nowadays. We look for food that's "quick and easy" or that fills us up. Fast. But, have you noticed that this approach to food isn't doing us any favors? The current food system has resulted in a world where too many kids and adults have grown overweight, and some have serious health problems that relate to diet. You might wonder if there is a way for YOU to change anything. Yes! You can help change things. But it will take some digging, not in dirt, but in research. Your goal will be to discover more about the food that you eat and where it comes from. This kind of "food knowledge" is very powerful. That is because the food in the kitchen and the meals we eat often reflect choices. Do some research and you will discover that those choices affect not just our own body and health, but the health of our communities as well.

Understanding food systems

I am lucky. I grew up on a small farm doing a lot of chores. I knew all about the food I ate. On our farm we had a garden, an orchard, a barn, and a few fields. I helped my mother can 1,000 quarts of food every summer and fall. We canned beans, beets, corn, tomatoes, peaches, pears, applesauce, pickles, and meat. We made our own yogurt, cheese, butter, and ice-cream from our small herd of cows. We fed our scraps to our pig. We named him Eat-Me which made it easier to eat him at some future date. We had a root cellar where we stored carrots, beets, and potatoes for a few months in the winter. We ground our own wheat and made delicious breads and cereal. Since this was during the 1940s and '50s, our country was more rural and people lived more simply. When I was thirteen, we got a deep freezer, which made our work much easier. Everyone in the family worked hard, but we had fun too. Looking back, I see that I took the plentiful supply of nutritious homegrown food for granted.

During the 1960s and 1970s many families started to purchase most of their food in the supermarkets and to eat lots of "fast food." The simple and healthy farm-to-plate food system was replaced. Growing, distributing, and selling

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About this issue...

Jan Schrock (pg. 1) describes how choices we make affect not only our own body and health, but the health of our communities.

Eileen Hyde (pg.3) introduces us to a middle school in Vermont where students devised innovative ways to educate Vermonters about local hunger.

Frances Moore Lappe (pg.5) explains why "her heart sank as I listened to Morning Edition's recent series on the world hunger crisis." She provides us with programs that work and are making a difference in the community.

Did you ever give any thought to how important breast feeding really is? Jen Chapin (pg.6) has and shares her thoughts with us.

Rounding out this issue, it is that time of the year when KIDS asks for your support. This year more than any time in the past, the program NEEDS YOU. Please read and take action!

Peace,

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food became separate industries. Many families spent more time hurrying from jobs to schools to after school activities. The value of locally grown fresh food was diminished. The increased pace of family lifestyles made it seem easier to “grab a burger” and eat in our cars. Fewer people knew where their food came from as the distance increased between farmers and their customers. There are many books, articles, and much research that explain more about food systems and make good projects for students teachers and community members to explore.

***Give a Goat* by Jan Schrock**

*Jan Schrock has traveled all over the world in her capacity as an educator and group leader for Heifer International. Naturally, she thought her first children’s book would be about those overseas projects. But when she put pen to paper, she realized she had another really important story to tell. She wanted to write something that would show American kids the role they could play in helping others. So she decided to write a true story about a group fifth graders in Portland Maine. This class at the East End Community School listened to their teacher read *Beatrice’s Goat* and then decided to get organized and raise funds to “give a goat” through Heifer International.*

Jan’s book is unique because it profiles “the giver” in philanthropy. Many books for children emphasize those “in need” and seek to build empathy for those who are less fortunate. This book is also a wonderful resource if you want to help children understand the MECHANICS of how fundraising at school works – including the roles of cooperative decision-making, planning and hands-on work in getting a charitable project off the ground.

*Writing **Give a Goat** is Jan Schrock’s way of reaching out to American children to help them understand their power and potential as “givers” not just locally, but globally.*

Because of my experience growing up on a farm, I support the work of Heifer International in our country and now work as an educator for Heifer International in many settings. Heifer’s goal here is to assist communities in creating sustainable local food systems. These projects reflect changes in the way many citizens in the USA—young and old—think about food.

What you can do!

Here are some simple ways you can learn about your local food system and make food decisions that have an impact!

- Buy locally grown food;
- Grow a garden at school, combined with many curriculums;
- Discover school gardening programs that are working in your area;
- Ask students to ask their grandparents about the food system and how it worked when they were growing up;
- Find out about farm-to-school programs;
- Become aware of the differences between fast food and healthy food;
- Ask questions; eat good nutritious food;
- Order Heifer’s (free) Global Education Resource Kit www.heifereducation.org;
- Form a study group on “Menu For the Future,” Northwest Earth Institute www.nwei.org;
- Take the on-line course, “Facing the Future: Educating and Inspiring a Global Generation. www.facingthefuture.org;
- Team with other teachers who seek to learn—it’s easier to work together; and
- Determine your ecological footprint www.kidsfootprint.org.

Kids and educators these days face a big challenge. We must work together to make change, and you’ll find that we can have fun working together! Kids in this country are so lucky that teachers in their schools will work with them to make better choices about the food they eat and to help them see the impact these changes can have—not just on their own bodies, but on their communities.

Jan Schrock, Senior Advisor for Heifer International, is a mother of two, grandmother of four, and a retired teacher. She lives in Maine near her grandchildren, is a gardener, and loves to cook. She enjoys her work with Heifer’s Education programs and leads study tours to see Heifer’s work around the world where families work together to end their hunger and poverty. She can be reached at Jan.Schrock@heifer.org





CREATING CHANGE: VERMONT STUDENTS LEARN THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCATING FOR OTHERS...

by Eileen Hyde

As the bell rang and classroom doors opened, swarms of adolescents spilled into the halls of Edmunds Middle School in Burlington, Vermont. With laughter filling the air, locker doors slamming and kids jumping down the stairs, it looked like business as usual for a typical middle school. Few would imagine that these same rambunctious students would soon be running off to grapple with one of society's most pressing problems and make significant contributions to improving the quality of life for their peers across the state of Vermont.

This past winter, 7th and 8th grade social studies students at Edmunds devised innovative ways to educate Vermonters about local hunger. As part of a Global Studies Unit, students were challenged to make connections between hunger abroad and in their home state, and to demonstrate what they learned by educating others. Dov Stucker, the Community Outreach Coordinator at Edmunds, designed the project to create a sense of empowerment in the students. "The goal was to tie what students learn in the classroom to local issues, with the greater goal of helping students feel like they are citizens now...and ideally playing a role to make things better."

At the start of their Global Studies Unit, the students learned how an array of issues including trade, geography, and economics are connected to the problem of hunger among the many diverse communities of Africa. Then teachers helped the students understand how this global problem also exists in their own community. The teachers used a combination of methods to explain the complexity of local hunger such as: reading articles, watching documentaries, and participating in household budgeting simulations to see first-hand how difficult it can be to purchase food for your family on a tight budget. They also met with front line providers and ad-

vocates, including representatives from the local charitable food network and the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, a statewide non-profit that works to expand participation in the federal nutrition programs, to learn about the safety net of solutions available to address hunger. Dov Stucker explained that, "bringing staff from local organizations into the classroom was really helpful because it lent weight to what we were doing. It showed students that teachers aren't choosing these issues arbitrarily – that they are real issues facing our community." By starting with the more familiar issue of global hunger and then working to put a face on hunger at the local level, students were fully engaged and prepared for a final assignment to teach others what they learned over the course of the unit.

Students chose a wide range of audiences to share what they had learned, such as their fellow students and state policy makers, and they used a variety of methods to get their message across. They focused much of their outreach on educating the community about the importance of school meals in preventing hunger. With about half the student body population enrolled in the free and reduced price meal program and universal free breakfast at their school, Edmunds students could clearly speak to the benefits of school breakfast and many understood what it meant to go without it. In one essay posted on the class' hunger-themed website, a student wrote about what happens when breakfast isn't available in school, "Nick knew exactly why his report card was so unbalanced. The D and two F's were before-lunch classes and the A and B+ were after lunch classes. Maybe all those teachers were right saying he had potential, but what was the point of potential if he was too hungry to use it?"

The Edmunds students took their school meal education

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**KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE® FINDING SOLUTIONS NEWSLETTER
A PROGRAM OF WORLD HUNGER YEAR (WHY)**

Published by:

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efforts even further by serving as community leaders and advocating for Vermont House Bill 333, a bill that expanded eligibility requirements so more Vermont students can access free breakfast. In a letter to a legislator, one student wrote, "Before school starts all kids from our school, no matter what their background is, come in to eat free breakfast, and we think all schools should have this opportunity too." As a result of their efforts, the students were invited to testify in front of the Vermont House Appropriations Committee on behalf of House Bill 333. Five of the six student representatives who testified went without breakfast the day before and spoke eloquently about how it impacted their ability to learn. The sixth student passionately explained that she could not afford to go without breakfast because she had algebra first period, her most challenging subject, and without breakfast she would have never been able to focus.

Representative Mitzi Johnson, a member of the committee, was impressed with the conviction and preparedness of the witnesses. Reflecting on the unanimous committee vote, she said, "Most students come to the statehouse to

observe the legislative process. These students came, armed with solid research, to influence policy on a hidden yet widespread problem. Despite the very difficult budget year, their compelling testimony made this an easy 'yes' to H.333." On May 3rd, the legislation was signed into law, allowing 7,500 additional at-risk students to receive free breakfast each day.

Hunger is increasing in Vermont, affecting about 1 in 10 households, and 19,000 children. The young Vermont leaders at Edmunds Middle School stepped outside their classroom walls and let their voices be heard to help make the nutrition safety net stronger for struggling Vermont families. As a result, the state of Vermont is one step closer to fulfilling the wish of the Edmunds student who wrote his legislator to say that "If I had one wish, it would be to let every school have breakfast for the kids who need it. Because they are the future."

Eileen Hyde recently completed an Americorp VISTA placement at the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger and is now an Emerson Congressional Hunger Fellow at Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force. She may be contacted at eileen-hyde@gmail.com*

BIG THINGS COMING TO KIDS IN 2009!

NEW TEACHER GUIDE- *"Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference" will be in its final printing. The guide will be interactive with our web site—eliminating the necessity of future printings.*

NEW Web Site- *Last year, we drew 1.2 million visitors to the site, and we will surpass that this year. Given that, why change? The reasons are the explosion of information and material PLUS it is time for us to enter the 21st Century!*

KIDS Advisory Board

Anne Baker-*Vice President National Peace Corps Association*

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NPR MISSES REAL STORY, PLANTS WRONG SEEDS...

By Frances Moore Lappe

Too bad.

I depend a lot on NPR, so my heart sank as I listened to Morning Edition's recent series on the world hunger crisis. Using Honduras as its case study, the four-part series reinforces dangerous myths that actually block us from seeing the real solutions to hunger all around us.

We're told that "across the globe [f]ood is expensive and there's not enough food to feed empty stomachs." No. In fact the world produces enough to make us all plump. True, today an estimated 100 million additional people are, or will soon be, facing hunger as food prices exceed their budgets, but the deeper lack they're experiencing is not food itself. It is power.

Drawing the distinction between lack of food -- a symptom -- and lack of power -- a cause -- is essential to seeing solutions. Yet this series portrays as progress examples that do nothing to correct, and in fact worsen, the underlying power imbalances at the heart of hunger.

In the broadcast, we hear that Wal-Mart is a solution because it provides a market for poor Honduran farmers who otherwise would have no way to sell their produce. But if access to a market is, in itself, farmers' salvation, here at home each year more than 10,000 farmers would not be going under. The question is who controls a market: Where the answer is a few monopsony buyers -- what Wal-Mart represents in the NPR case study -- power remains with them. They set the terms and they decide whether to stay or to leave.

Fortunately, in Latin America and elsewhere some rural communities are beginning to free themselves from distant, monopoly power. Imagine this: In what may be the pesticide capital of the world, the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, pests developed insecticide resistance and genetically modified (GM) cotton failed to live up to Monsanto's promises. Farmers faced catastrophic losses, triggering thousands of suicides, and many then began to

move in another direction. Now, almost two thousand villages are embracing community-managed sustainable farming using natural pest controls, not purchased chemicals, and are enjoying improved incomes and health. Yet, the NPR series ignores such hopeful examples. It notes gloomily that most small Honduran farmers will cut back on production this year, despite higher prices for their crops, because "prices for fertilizer and pesticides have gone up even more than food prices."

In a disturbing disconnect, the series still promote as solutions not only purchased farm chemicals but genetically modified seeds; yet the cost of these seeds puts them out of reach of many poor farmers, as acknowledged at the tail end of the second piece in the series. Worse, and not acknowledged, are the documented, serious environmental and health risks linked to GM seeds.

NPR misses the real story: On every continent one can find empowered rural communities developing GM-free, agro-ecological farming systems. They're succeeding: The largest overview study, looking at farmers transitioning to sustainable practices in 57 countries, involving almost 13 million small farmers on almost 100 million acres, found after four years that average yields were up 79 percent. NPR chose to reinforce the myth that the only hope for poor rural people is dependency on concentrated economic power when, all over the world, poor farming communities are discovering their own power to work with each other and with nature to build healthier, more secure, and more democratic lives.

What a lost opportunity.

Frances Moore Lappe of the Small Planet Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is the author of sixteen books, most recently Getting a Grip: Clarity, Creativity, and Courage in a World Gone Mad. This article was previously posted on The Huffington Post, © 2008 Frances Moore Lappé. Reprinted with permission. For more information and resources on the world food/hunger crisis, please visit the World Hunger Solutions page at [smallplanet.org](http://www.smallplanet.org/worldhunger): <http://www.smallplanet.org/worldhunger>

AN EDUCATIONAL WEB SITE TO VISIT— World Savvy (www.worldsavvy.org) is a global education nonprofit serving youth and educators through three core programs in three offices nationwide. Their mission is to educate and engage youth in community and world affairs, to prepare them to learn, work and live as responsible global citizens in the 21st century.



ONE GOOD THING FOR BABIES—AND THE PLANET...

By Jen Chapin

One might think that this publication would provide a respite from more idle speculation about Sarah Palin's personal life – but no such luck. I've got one burning question of an intimate nature, one that I've had ever since she burst into national public life, but one that has yet to be addressed by the mainstream media. It's probably inappropriate for any journalist to ask, but I want to know: is Sarah Palin—a newsworthy working mother—still breastfeeding?

It seems that at least up until she was picked at the Republican party's Vice Presidential nominee, Palin was among the 31% of American women who breastfed her infant for at least 3 months, and for this she should be commended. Breastfeeding can be intimidating and even painful at first, but it is well established that the benefits to babies are numerous, significant, and lasting: better respiratory and digestive health, increased immune function, healthier teeth and jaw development, decreased risk of allergies and obesity, perhaps even higher IQ. Infant formula is a lifesaver for the minority of women who cannot breastfeed because of necessary medication, insufficient lactation, adoption, etc., but even the manufacturers of formula must concede that breast is best. "Closest to breast milk" the packages claim, in an acknowledgement that industrially produced formula cannot match what nature makes so effortlessly.

But breastfeeding is far from the norm in the US and increasingly throughout developing countries, which seem to be in a race to copy our worst dietary habits. Some families view the question of to breastfeed or not as a lifestyle or even an aesthetic choice (in a puritanical yet highly sexualized society, we want bosoms to be either altogether obscured or displayed as decoration only) but tragically, most often it is not a choice of all, given a workplace that depends on women but can be unfriendly to motherhood. Palin was smart enough to use her chief executive status to make her own choice, but how many women have that choice, especially in a time of great economic vulnerability?

Progressive employers know that allowing nursing mothers to have a few 20 minute breaks and a private place to

pump is a smart investment in productivity (interestingly, breastfeeding mother miss fewer days) and staff morale, and overall societal support can go far in bringing down the costs to public health and welfare that we all share when babies are formula-fed. Yet that support is sadly lacking, particularly for those women and children who most benefit from breastfeeding's financial, health and emotional benefits. Unmarried, low-income, teenage, less-educated, minority and rural mothers are the least likely to breastfeed.

In the developing world, the trend away from breastfeeding can be devastating. Many of us remember the catastrophic sales campaign launched by Nestlé, where women dressed as nurses hawked formula to women who had neither the money for an adequate supply of the powder, nor access to the clean water and sanitation required to make it. The recent episode in China, where at least 53,000 children were sickened and 3 died because of intentional chemical contamination of formula, illustrates on a massive scale the tragedy of corporate intrusion into this most beautiful and efficient of body processes.

How many thousands of dollars can a family save by taking advantage of superior free food and fewer doctor bills and missed workdays? How many resources can be preserved in bypassing the industrial production of cow milk and soybeans, sweeteners, fatty acids, hormones, and varied other compounds required to try to replicate human breastmilk? And what of the plastics and metals required for packaging and bottles? What clearer way to opt out of the poisonous and unsustainable industrial food system than to make use of this unique food produced by our own bodies?

In choosing to breastfeed her son Sarah Palin has done at least one good thing for the planet.

More information and breastfeeding resources are available at La Leche League International (www.llli.org)

Jen Chapin is a musician, activist and educator. She serves as Board Secretary for WHY. She is a member of KIDS Advisory Board. Her most recent album is called "Light of Mine" and is available at www.jenchapin.com.



THIS DOES NOT COMPUTE!... **By Jane Finn Levine and Larry Levine**

Given the trying economic times we are experiencing, our yearly appeal is an especially difficult one to frame. We feel that in the midst of the political campaign, the best approach is to provide you with the financial situation of KIDS—and not beat around the bush. Simply come right out and ask for your financial support.

As most of you are aware, KIDS is a self-funded program of WHY. The simple reason is that when we founded the program 15 years ago, KIDS was small and had limited goals. We realized that the need for an educational program of this nature was strong and we quickly expanded our vision. After two years wandering in the desert, we made a number of decisions that became the foundation of KIDS:

- To ally ourselves with World Hunger Year (WHY). A natural place for KIDS as we were members of their Board of Directors and we fit right into WHY's mission.
- To maintain our financial independence so that we would not pull needed funds from any of WHY's other important programs by competing for funds with these programs.
- That we would not be paid for operating the program and in essence being the total operating staff.
- That we would not charge KIDS rent or for any utilities.
- That we would raise our own funds in support of our operating budget.

We are happy to report that in our 15 years KIDS has not only survived but has grown. In the 2007 fall issue, Teaching Tolerance magazine article KIDS was singled as the program that breaks the mold,. Over 5,000 teacher guides have been purchased by educators and others interested in education and social justice issues.

As Professor Tim Kasser states, "So when we think of the

KIDS program, we can recognize that it does good work in at least three regards. First, it helps to solve problems of hunger and poverty, laudable goals in their own right. Second, by helping kids see the importance of helping others, it encourages a value system at odds with the consumer culture in which we live. Finally, the types of values encouraged by KIDS may actually help improve the quality of its participants' lives, making teens happier and better adjusted. What more could one ask?"

So, what doesn't compute? Simply stated the effort to raise funds to continue the work of KIDS has fallen solidly on the backs of about 200 folks who contribute every year. We derive our operating capital from contributions and from sales of the teacher guide. Our audience greatly exceeds the number of donors. For example, there are 2,000 subscribers to this publication. That means 1,800 readers are getting a "free ride!"

This is where you come in.

If you have read this far and are not a current contributor to KIDS **Now is the time for you to change that.** If you are a contributor we thank you and ask you to consider increasing your contribution this year. **If everyone was to contribute \$15, our yearly budget would be more than covered.**

Knowing that there are some who can not afford to contribute and whose organizations don't have any "loose jingle in their jeans", we need to provide those who are not able to give the ability to receive the newsletter. Everyone who wants the newsletter, must be able to get their own copy.

Here is an offer we hope you can not refuse. For every contribution of \$25, you are entitled to one KIDS T-shirt. Supplies are limited so act fast. Please see enclosed insert to order.

Please become one of KIDS' heroes.

KIDS TEACHER GUIDE AVAILABLE

Contains Updated Statistics & Resources

Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference by Stephanie Kempf.

Uplifting, engaging, interactive and challenging lessons for middle and high school students on the root causes of and solutions to domestic and international hunger. Examines colonialism, contemporary development projects, the media, famine vs. chronic hunger, the working poor and more, as well as valuable ideas for how kids can make a difference in their community, and in the world around them.

Price... \$26 + \$8 shipping. Includes free one year subscription to the KIDS Newsletter!

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“If I were a teacher struggling to help students remain human in a sea of cynicism and self-absorption, I would grab onto this book as if it were a life raft and use it to bring my class to shore.”

*Joan Dye Gussow, Professor Emeritus,
Teachers College, Columbia University*



A Program of World Hunger Year

**1 Borodell Avenue
Mystic, CT 06355**

The purpose of **Kids Can Make A Difference®** is to inspire young people to realize that it is within their power to help eliminate hunger and poverty in their communities, their country, and their world.