Farming Bill and U.S. international food aid policy: Factors influencing recent reforms and their effects on global hunger, food security, and nutrition

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Objectives
1. A review of the major U.S. policies related to international food aid, including food aid legislation in Title II of the Farm Bill and the Emergency Food Security Program.
2. A review of the interplay of actors, political contexts, and issue characteristics involved in U.S. international food aid policies.
3. An analysis, using Shiffman and Shrum’s framework, of recent U.S. international food aid policy reform efforts and their failure to be enacted into law.

Background & Significance
- Millennium Development Goal 1: Halve the number of people who suffer from hunger
- As of 2014, 800 million people globally suffer from chronic hunger
- International food aid, also referred to as food assistance, aims to save lives by providing needed food in times of natural disaster, conflict, or other emergency
- In the U.S. world’s largest donor of food aid, donating over $1.5 billion in food aid in 2013
- U.S. international food aid policy is complex, involving several groups of opposing stakeholders, and has been the subject of reform efforts in recent years
- This public health analysis reviews the mechanisms and actors at work in this interaction of U.S. domestic and international public health policy and analyzes the failure of recent reforms to be enacted, with President Obama’s 2013 reform proposal highlighted as a case study.

Food aid: Origins of the U.S. system
- 1954: Food for Peace, primary food aid legislation, signed into law to address U.S. agricultural surpluses and provide humanitarian aid. Authorizes every ~5 years within the larger omnibus U.S. “Farm Bill”
- Includes food aid programs for both emergencies (natural disasters, conflicts, etc.) and development programs (development programs limited by NGOs)
- President Eisenhower stated that Food for Peace is meant to “lay the basis for a permanent expansion of U.S. exports of agricultural products with lasting benefit to the [recipient] and the people of other less fortunate lands.
- This lays the groundwork for two different purposes for U.S. international food aid: 1) To benefit American economic interests. 2) To provide humanitarian assistance to people in other countries

Food aid: Three major controversies
- In-kind commodity donations (instead of cash-based assistance): Donating actual food involves a long chain of purchasing, bagging, and shipping within and from the U.S. before food reaches people in need in other countries
- Evaluations have found: waste time and money
- “This type of food aid to donor country’s economic interests is heavily criticized by other countries and the World Trade Organization
- Most of U.S. food aid is in kind: 54.74 billion and 1.3 million metric tons in 2013
- Potential policy solutions: Cash-based assistance instead of the in-kind donations. The U.S. already does this through a relatively small program ($300 million), the Emergency Food Security Program, which implements the following programs:
  1. Food for Peace commodities in emergencies (development programs implemented by NGOs)
  2. CDRF: Cash Delivery Relief Fund
  3. Food Security Program, which implements the following programs:
    a. Commodity grants
    b. Food for Peace commodities
    c. EFAC: Emergency Food Assistance Contingency

Food aid policy reform efforts
- Food aid reform efforts from 2005 to 2013 focused on moving the U.S. food aid system away from the three controversial mechanisms mentioned previously to a system that provides cash transfer-based assistance
- In its 2014 Presidential Budget Request (submitted to Congress in 2013), the Obama Administration sought expanded flexibility in policy changes that would end Food for Peace Food Title II, moving all these funds to already-existing USAID

Actors and interest characteristics
- Powerless actors?
  1. farmers
  2. NGOs
  3. non-governmental organizations

Monetization
- Selling Food for Peace commodities in the local markets of recipient countries
- NGOs use these funds to run non-emergency development programs
- Evaluations found: inefficient, waste money, might harm local markets

Factors preventing food aid reform from being enacted into law
- Unlikely partnership of big industry and humanitarian-minded NGOs is powerful. NGOs suffer legitimacy in the industry
- Reform-opposed actors were not included in negotiating the suggested policy reforms and, subsequently, took a defensive, reactive stance instead of being open to compromise
- Reform-opposed actors are well-organized to lobby against reform (associations represent industry while NGOs have an organizing body; reform-supporting actors do not have one cohesive voice)
- External frame (for opposed actors): reform will hurt U.S. jobs
- External frame (for opposed actors): cash-based assistance won’t provide transparency and accountability
- Internal frame: food aid should benefit U.S. economic interests

Conclusions
- U.S. international food aid policy is comprised of a complex set of mechanisms bringing together federal agencies, various American business sectors, and development-minded NGOs, all with different perspectives toward food aid reform
- For food aid policy reform to be successful in the future:
  1. All stakeholders must be included in the negotiating table to discuss new food aid policies
  2. External idea frames (regarding U.S. jobs and food aid accountability) need to be investigated
  3. Issue characteristics (regarding the efficiency of new policies that change the three controversial mechanisms) need to be strengthened with further evaluation studies

Literature cited
- Accountability Office (2011). Evaluations found: inefficient, wastes money, might harm local markets