

# A CALL TO ACTION

## VICKI HIRD

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*'We need 'nutritional' security not just 'food' security. There's a world of difference between what global and national food corporations provide and what we actually need. 'Food security' could include high fat content, sugar, oils, and feeds for industrial meat. 'Nutritional security' on the other hand considers the health value of food and the ways in which the food system determines an individual's ability to get essential nutrients, and not just calories.'*

The last time global food prices reached the highs of this year was 10 years ago, when global instability and food riots contributed to the overthrow of governments in Libya and Egypt and many started to protect supplies. The causes of those peak prices a decade ago included the production of crops for fuel not food, oil and energy price rises, dietary shifts and hedge fund speculation in food commodities. All these same factors are here again now, and they are possibly at higher levels.

In addition, there is also fallout from the pandemic, more regional conflict, and growing climate breakdown. Droughts have been hitting Latin America, and agricultural top player Brazil is facing its worst drought in 91 years. A global food crisis is looking like a real possibility.

Such occurrences may become more frequent if the world's farms start to fail on a large scale – as depleted soils are not replenished, and fresh water sources are hit by drought, over-extraction and pollution. Our aid and trade policies also favour monoculture, so high input, export-led production has become the norm, rather than sustainable, resilient, and diverse food production for national and regional markets. Systemic failure is very possible.

And we need 'nutritional' security not just 'food' security. There's a world of difference between

what global and national food corporations provide (and encourage us to buy with extremely sophisticated advertising) and what we actually need. 'Food security' could include high fat content, sugar, oils, and feeds for industrial meat. 'Nutritional security' on the other hand considers the health value of food and the ways in which the food system determines an individual's ability to get essential nutrients, and not just calories.

Key tools we need to use if we are to deliver nutritional security for all would include:

1. Prioritising the protection of resources, including soil and water, using natural bio-controls and promoting the genetic diversity that underpins food production, with strong targets, well-enforced regulation, and fiscal measures.
2. Building agroecological farming systems (with incentives and penalties, advice, R&D) that provide food and more diverse products, whilst restoring and maintaining the natural systems in and around the farm and reducing global warming impacts. Less and better meat has to be part of this adjustment in affluent regions, given the unsustainable levels of pollution and land use, and public health risks (communicable as well as non-communicable) involved in industrial livestock systems, and the land clearances to accommodate their needs.

3. Driving dietary shifts and investing in new supply chains to match that supply.

4. Curbing the marketing and power of food corporations that squeeze producers everywhere and increasingly sell highly processed foods that rely on cheap raw materials. Some countries have made a start with supply chain binding codes of practice, sugar taxes and curbs on advertising to children. We need more to achieve nutritional security.

5. Addressing the impact of food commodity speculation – crops that pass through several hands before they are even grown – and harmful investments. This speculation can't help deliver stable farm incomes and fair consumer prices, nor can the remote unaccountable hedge funds that are acquiring control of the means of production, for example seeds, genetics, inputs and land.

6. Investing in strong early warning systems to avoid worst case scenarios.

These are big asks. And some would argue we've never had it so good. There is currently more choice from the global market place and the market seems to be providing. But this is not true for many of the world's malnourished eaters, and we are working on borrowed time with thinning soils, marine resources polluted or depleted, and climate change already making farming unstable, with land loss in many regions.

Fixing it through game changing tech like protein bug farms or algal fields may be options, but they are still a way off, and there are no guarantees that they will work. Nor will they fix the harm industrial farming causes in time, nor tackle underlying inequalities. Agroecology on the other hand is a win/win solution, and we should make the transition now.

Hungry people don't wait. Politicians shouldn't either.