

EXCERPTED FROM

**The World Food Problem:  
Tackling the Causes of  
Undernutrition in the Third World**

THIRD EDITION

Howard D. Leathers and Phillips Foster

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# PREFACE

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In the twelve years since the first edition of this book was published, the world food problem has grown less severe, but is still a long way from solution. Our understanding of the causes and policy solutions continues to evolve. The third edition of this book incorporates material on the growing debates over globalization and genetically modified food and includes new chapters on the history of famines and the feasibility of solving the world food problem through redistribution alone. It incorporates up-to-date statistical information and references to recent analyses of the causes and effects of undernutrition and related policies. This edition also attempts to provide a more solid understanding of how economic principles can be applied to these issues. Real-world examples are presented to illustrate the general points.

Despite these changes, the principal messages of the first edition remain as valid today as they were in 1992. Undernutrition remains a problem for hundreds of millions of people in developing countries. Poverty, income inequalities, population growth, and illness continue to be important causes of undernutrition while increasing agricultural production will be an integral part of any strategy to reduce world hunger.

## **The Plan of the Book**

We begin with an emphasis on definitions and facts. As the material develops, our emphasis shifts to behavioral models of society (for example, economic, demographic) and how these models relate to undernutrition. In the last section, we discuss how these models can be applied in evaluating nutrition policy alternatives.

In Part 1, malnutrition is found to be a leading killer throughout the world, with undernutrition in the developing world the main nutrition problem. Before considering the causes of undernutrition and policy alternatives to alleviate it, we examine the facts and provide answers to questions such as: What is malnutrition? How do we measure it? Who is malnourished?

What are the trends?

In Part 2, we look at the main causes of undernutrition and attribute these causes mainly to economic, demographic, agronomic, and health variables.

In Part 3, we explore public policies that will have an impact on undernutrition. The final chapter contains some speculations about the future.

We have attempted to integrate knowledge from a number of disciplines, taking as a central premise, well articulated by Beatrice Rogers (1988b) of Tufts University, that “the solution to the world hunger problem will be achieved only through the integration of knowledge from the whole range of relevant scientific disciplines.” Thus, we have drawn on nutrition science, economics, demography, biology, chemistry, health science, geography, agronomy, history, anthropology, philosophy, and public policy analysis.


To a large extent, this book is data driven. From the tables on foreign assistance in the opening chapter through the data on malnutrition in Part 1, and the numbers on elasticity and population in Part 2, to the future projections about production, consumption, and prices in the last chapter, the text is larded with illustrative tables and figures. It is our hope that the data themselves will, in large measure, back up our arguments. The text set in numerous boxes serves not only to provide visual variety, but to bring the reader’s attention to interesting related material and examples.

The second edition of this text acknowledged our debt of gratitude to, among others, Professor Leslie Whittington, who taught the course from which this book was developed after Professor Foster, and before Professor Leathers. We dedicate this edition to the memory of Professor Whittington, who was murdered, along with her husband and children, on September 11, 2001.

*Howard D. Leathers  
Phillips Foster*

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