

Policies interfere with getting food to needy people

Written by Gothenburg Times
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LINCOLN—The 2011 World Food Prize Laureate said the world can produce enough food to feed its growing population, but global food policies and politics are major impediments.

Per Pinstrup-Andersen of Cornell University made his comments Tuesday during his Heuermann Lecture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. As have most other speakers in the series, Pinstrup-Andersen focused on the world's capacity to feed a population expected to grow from 7 billion to 9 billion by 2050.

"We've got lots of food in the world," Pinstrup-Andersen said. "The problem is inappropriate policies, not food supply."

Since 2007, he noted, food prices have fluctuated dramatically. At one point, many experts predicted, incorrectly, the end of inexpensive food. India ended up with 80 million tons of grain in storage last year, half of it outside, rotting on the ground. Zambian farmers doubled their corn production from about 2005 to 2011.

Pinstrup-Andersen estimated that about 2.9 quadrillion (that's 12 zeros) pounds of food are lost every year throughout the distribution system. That amount would feed the 2 billion people expected to be added to the population. Although it's unrealistic to expect to capture that entire loss, some of it could be saved through better policies and management.

Pinstrup-Andersen said he expects large fluctuations in food prices to continue and perhaps get worse. Climate change is one reason. Others include governmental policy, speculation, reduced grain stocks and use of grain in biofuels.

Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are of particular concern. By 2030, estimates are that two-thirds of the world's middle class will live in Asia, compared to just 28 percent in 2009. As their wealth grows, their diets will change – fewer grains, fruits and vegetables; more vegetable oil, meat, eggs and fish.

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“We need to pay a lot of attention to the new middle class in Asia,” said Pinstруп-Andersen, the H.E. Babcock Professor of Food, Nutrition and Public Policy, the J. Thomas Clark Professor of Entrepreneurship and a professor of applied economics at Cornell University, and an adjunct professor of food economics at the University of Copenhagen.

Pinstруп-Andersen said more money must be invested in research and technology, including genetic modification. He also called for more investment in rural infrastructures in developing countries; orderly trade policies; rules governing land acquisition; and antitrust legislation.

Pinstруп-Andersen served 10 years as the International Food Policy Research Institute’s director general in Washington, D.C., and seven years as a department head. He also served seven years as an economist at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture in Colombia, and six years as a professor at Wageningen University.

Heuermann Lectures focus on providing and sustaining enough food, natural resources and renewable energy for the world’s people, and on securing the sustainability of rural communities where the vital work of producing food and renewable energy occurs. They’re made possible by a gift from B. Keith and Norma Heuermann of Phillips, long-time university supporters with a strong commitment to Nebraska’s production agriculture, natural resources, rural areas and people.