Script for a "hunger banquet"
by Brian Tomasik and Youth Ending Hunger
spring 2005

In spring 2005, the Guilderland High School club "Youth Ending Hunger" carried out a "hunger banquet" with some classes whose teachers agreed to come. This is the script for the performance and sketches we did. I've replaced names with initials for anonymity.

Props/Materials
-Dry-erase marker for the board.
-Soup cans and other props for skit 1.
-Two lab coats and two farmer outfits.
-Corn-flea-beetle costume.
-Food-bank video.
-120 copies of quiz and resources sheet.
-Candy.

Candy
(We will not need this much if we don't have all four of our slots filled; I'll let you know soon how many classes will be coming.)
-12 king-sized bars
-32 bite-sized bars
-80 skittles
-80 extra bite-sized bars for the poor students to take at the end.

Text of Hunger Banquet 2005

Have students sit down at the tables.

T: Thank you all for coming to this "Hunger Banquet," put on by the club Youth Ending Hunger. Before we begin the banquet, I'll have K explain the drawings on the board.

K: Every minute, 17 people die of hunger or hunger-related causes. Each of these lines represents one person. I'll be drawing these on the board throughout the course of the banquet to represent the deaths as they occur.

Pass out cards.

BRIAN: Now we're passing out cards describing the person whom you will be playing. Your income level will determine how much food you will receive. If you have a "wealthy" card, raise your hand now so that we can give you your meal.

Deliver to the rich students a full candy bar.

BRIAN: Okay, now those with "moderate income" should raise their hands.

Deliver to moderate-income students a bite-sized bar.

BRIAN: Now those with "poor" cards.

Deliver to poor students one skittle.

BRIAN: We'll give you a few minutes to eat your meals and discuss your cards.

Pass out the myths quiz.

BRIAN: If you're still eating, that's all right. What we're passing out now is a brief quiz about hunger. Take a minute to answer the questions.

Wait a minute.

BRIAN: Now we'll give you the answers to the quiz using skits. This first skit addresses question 1—the statement that "Hunger exists because the world does not produce enough food."

Perform skit 1 (S, M, AND T)

BRIAN: I'll give a little more information about question 1 that we couldn't convey in the skit. The statement is false, as you saw. In terms of wheat, rice, and other forms of grain alone, the world produces enough food to provide everyone with 3,500 calories per day; that figure does not even count vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, and fish.[1] Most "hungry countries" have enough food for all of their people: indeed, almost 80 percent of malnourished children in the Third world live in countries producing food surpluses.[2] The problem is not food scarcity but poverty, which limits both access to food on the market and access to the land, credit, and resources that people need to grow food themselves.

S: Our next skit addresses question 2—the statement that "The Green Revolution has generally increased food production."

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[1] http://www.foodfirst.org/pubs/backgrdrs/1998/s98v5n3.html

[2] Gary Gardner and Brian Halweil, *Underfed and Overfed*, Worldwatch Paper 150, 17.

Perform skit 2:

M1 (SCIENTIST 1): You know what's awesome?

M2 (SCIENTIST 2): What?

M1: The Green Revolution.

M2: Yeah? Why?

M1: Because with new and improved fertilizer and pesticide technology, as well as high-yielding seeds, farmers will be able to increase production and finally break the cycle of poverty!

J (FARMER): Although that sounds good in theory, it does not actually work in practice.

M1 AND M2: Huh?

J: Many poor farmers cannot afford the green revolution's technological inputs, which just increases the disparity between rich and poor. And while the Green Revolution may increase food production, it often does so at the expense of food diversity and nutrition.

M1: You know what sucks?

M2: What?

M1: Everything!

S: I'll give a little more information. As you saw, statement 2 is true but requires qualification. While the Green Revolution has generally increased total food production in poor countries, it has usually not reduced hunger; in fact, in many cases, the exact opposite is true. (a) The Green Revolution's capital-intensive production methods tend to accentuate inequality by benefiting only those producers wealthy enough to afford new seeds and chemicals. The so-called "high-yielding varieties" that have been introduced only succeed with adequate fertilizer and sophisticated water management; when poor farmers are unable to afford to create ideal conditions, the Green-Revolution seeds are no better than native varieties and in many cases are actually *more* vulnerable to droughts and floods.[3]

T: At the same time, the Green Revolution's narrow focus on yields ignored the importance of nutrition. While increased cultivation of corn, wheat, and rice produced more calories, it often came at the expense of legumes and root crops—which contain more protein, vitamins, and minerals.[4]

BRIAN: Our last skit deals with question 3—the statement that "Genetic engineering of crops is the solution to world hunger."

Perform skit 3:

NARRATOR (T): Here you see two poor farmers, Enrique (M) and Ali (M). Ali has planted a variety of conventional crops—corn, beans, tomatoes, and assorted greens. Enrique, on the other hand, plants exclusively corn that has been genetically modified to

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[3] Francis Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins, *Food First*, 129-130.

[4] Gardner 18.

withstand herbicide. Ali saves his seeds from year to year and uses crop rotation and other natural methods to control pests. Enrique, meanwhile, is forced to purchase his seeds new every year because they are patented; he also buys expensive herbicides. But Enrique is certain that his genetically modified corn will pay off in the end.

Before we continue—who in the audience thinks that Enrique will do better? Who thinks that Ali will do better?

Here's what happens: In August, a devastating horde of corn-flea beetles (J) strikes the area. The corn crops of both Enrique and Ali are destroyed. While Ali still has his tomatoes, beans, and other crops to sustain him, Enrique has nothing.

BRIAN: As the skit showed, statement 3 is False. Because genetically modified crops are patented, growers are forced either to buy new seeds every year or to pay an annual licensing fee for saving them. Coupled with an increased need for chemical inputs, this means higher costs of production that only already-wealthy landowners are able to afford. Moreover, genetically engineered crops are meant to be sold widely and therefore are not well adapted to specific local conditions. And because biotech farmers usually plant just one type of crop, they are more vulnerable to being wiped out by a single pest or disease, as you saw in the skit. For these reasons, delegates from 18 African countries at a meeting of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization issued the following statement:

M: "We [...] strongly object [to the fact] that the image of the poor and hungry from our countries is being used by giant multinational corporations to push a technology that is neither safe, environmentally friendly, nor economically beneficial to us. We do not believe that such companies or gene technologies will help our farmers to produce the food that is needed [...]. On the contrary [...] it will undermine our capacity to feed ourselves."[5]

S: Now I'll give some information about question 4—the statement that "Hunger is a problem in the US." Statement 4 is true. Though few people in the US actually starve to death, chronic mild undernutrition is surprisingly widespread. In 2003, 36 million Americans lived in homes that were "food insecure"—meaning that they lacked the resources to afford sufficient amounts of food at least some of the time. 11 million of those people lived in households classified as "hungry"—meaning that food purchases were restricted to such a point that adults, and sometimes even children, experienced hunger on a regular basis.[6]

For further detail on hunger in the US, we have a short video.

Play the Food-Bank video.

BRIAN: Now that we're done with the quiz, let's return to the drawings on the board.

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[5] http://www.earthisland.org/eijournal/new_articles.cfm?articleID=282&journalID=49

[6] http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger_index.html

K: In the ___X__ minutes since I began, ____17X_____ people have died from hunger or hunger-related causes.

BRIAN: Now, to conclude, we'll give you a few ways that you can help.

Pass out hunger-resources sheets.

BRIAN: Right now, we're passing out sheets with some helpful websites and resources.

J: At the top of the sheet, you can see links to the "free-click websites." Every time that you click on these pages, the sites' advertisers give a small amount of money to organizations addressing hunger and poverty. On any single computer, you are allowed to visit these sites at most once a day.

M: Below that are a couple organizations working to address hunger and poverty through long-term changes in government policy. These websites have detailed information on the root causes of hunger, as well as advocacy letters that you can send to your members of Congress.

S: Next on the sheet are local organizations with which you can volunteer and earn community-service hours. Youth Ending Hunger occasionally volunteers as a group with both of these charities.

BRIAN: One of the easiest ways that you can make a difference is through your purchasing. When shopping for coffee, chocolate, tea, clothing, and other products, look for the "fair-trade certified" logo that you see on the sheet. "Fair trade" means that farmers and craft workers are paid a livable wage through direct long-term contracts. It guarantees that no child labor or forced labor was used and that ecologically sustainable practices were employed.

K: Finally, you can check out Youth Ending Hunger. We meet every other Monday after school in Room [...]. Our next and last meeting of the year will be on Monday, June 6.

G.: [History of YEH]

T: In our last _____ minutes, you'll be having group discussions at your tables, facilitated by one or two Youth Ending Hunger members.

Questions: (1) How did this experience make you feel? (2) Has this "hunger banquet" changed you perspective on hunger? If so, how? (3) What could we have done differently to make the banquet more interesting and effective?

T: That brings us to the end of the banquet. If any of you in the poor and moderate-income classes would like some extra candy, feel free to take it as you leave. Thank you for coming.

A Hunger Quiz

1. T F Hunger exists because the world does not produce enough food.

2. T F The Green Revolution (the introduction of high-yielding seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides to poor countries) has generally increased food production.

3. T F Genetic engineering of crops is the solution to world hunger.

4. T F Hunger is a problem in the United States.

Answers

1. Statement 1 is False. In terms of wheat, rice, and other forms of grain alone, the world produces enough food to provide everyone with 3,500 calories per day; that figure does not even count vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, and fish.[7] Most "hungry countries" have enough food for all of their people: indeed, almost 80 percent of malnourished children in the Third world live in countries producing food surpluses.[8] The problem is not food scarcity but poverty, which limits both access to food on the market and access to the land, credit, and resources that people need to grow food themselves.

2. Statement 2 is True but requires qualification. While the Green Revolution has generally increased total food production in poor countries, it has usually not reduced hunger; in fact, in many cases, the exact opposite is true. (a) The Green Revolution's capital-intensive production methods tend to accentuate inequality by benefiting only those producers wealthy enough to afford new seeds and chemicals. The so-called "high-yielding varieties" that have been introduced only succeed with adequate fertilizer and sophisticated water management; when poor farmers are unable to afford to create ideal conditions, the Green-Revolution seeds are no better than native varieties and in many

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[8] Gary Gardner and Brian Halweil, *Underfed and Overfed*, Worldwatch Paper 150, 17.

cases are actually *more* vulnerable to droughts and floods.[9] (b) At the same time, the Green Revolution's narrow focus on yields ignored the importance of nutrition. While increased cultivation of corn, wheat, and rice produced more calories, it often came at the expense of legumes and root crops—which contain more protein, vitamins, and minerals.[10]

3. Statement 3 is False. Because genetically modified crops are patented, growers are forced either to buy new seeds every year or to pay an annual licensing fee for saving them. Coupled with an increased need for chemical inputs, this means higher costs of production that only already-wealthy landowners are able to afford. Moreover, genetically engineered crops are meant to be sold widely and therefore are not well adapted to specific local conditions. And because biotech farmers usually plant just one type of crop, they are more vulnerable to being wiped out by a single pest or disease. For these reasons, delegates from 18 African countries at a meeting of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization issued the following statement: "We [...] strongly object [to the fact] that the image of the poor and hungry from our countries is being used by giant multinational corporations to push a technology that is neither safe, environmentally friendly, nor economically beneficial to us. We do not believe that such companies or gene technologies will help our farmers to produce the food that is needed [...]. On the contrary [...] it will undermine our capacity to feed ourselves."[11]

4. Statement 4 is true. Though few people in the US actually starve to death, chronic mild undernutrition is surprisingly widespread. In 2003, 36 million Americans lived in homes that were "food insecure"—meaning that they lacked the resources to afford sufficient amounts of food at least some of the time. 11 million of those people lived in households classified as "hungry"—meaning that food purchases were restricted to such a point that adults, and sometimes even children, experienced hunger on a regular basis.[12]

[9] Francis Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins, *Food First*, 129-130.
[10] Gardner 18.
[11] http://www.earthisland.org/eijournal/new_articles.cfm?articleID=282&journalID=49
[12] http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger_index.html