

A SPECIFIC CALL FOR ACTION

By Kenneth S. Marsh

IUFoST President, Alan Mortimer, published “A call to Action” in the Number 59, December 2004 Newslines which included a plea to help feed the world as an organization. I wish to support him in this plea.

IUFoST has been enhancing food efforts all along with, as Mr. Mortimer mentions, the joint FAO/IUFoST database, distant learning, symposia and the myriad of programs expressed in his article. As he implied, many individual efforts do not get recorded. IUFoST delegates, and specifically members of The Academy, continue to be a resource for global food efforts. I wish to propose a formal joining of these individual efforts into a recognized entity dedicated to reducing global hunger. This is really not tremendously different from efforts happening within the IUFoST community, but rather a means to expand this knowledge base beyond the food science/technology community.

This may sound trivial to many people in IUFoST and its Adhering Bodies who have offered their expertise to reduce world hunger, but there is always a tendency to speak to other food scientists and miss an alternative perspective. I was guilty of this for over seven years until a small institute in a small Less Developed Country (LDC) put me to shame. A brief retelling of the circumstances could be instructive, and follows in the next five paragraphs.

I had proposed the creation of a Center for Global Food Security as I considered accepting an endowed professorship in a Southern land grant university. I received substantial support from professors in food science, agricultural economics and other departments, but was unable to gain support from administration which saw their charter in terms of helping local farmers.

In June 1999, I was asked to present the keynote speech at the ceremony to induct past and present winners of the Nicholas Appert award (the highest award in food science) into the Association Internationale Nicholas Appert in France. The address was entitled “Fulfilling Appert’s Dream: Using Technology to Insure a Secure Food Supply for the World’s Population” which expanded the sciences to preserve food into a program to bring that food to hungry people.

I was asked to chair a session entitled “Food Security” at the World Food Congress X (Sydney, Australia, October, 1999) when session developer, Joe Hulse, was unable to attend for medical reasons. I presented “Reducing Post-Harvest Losses to Enhance Food Security” which essentially suggested bringing a team of experts into various LDCs, assessing food losses, and proposing methods of reducing those losses. Similar seminars were presented to the World Bank, professional meetings, and short courses in US and Africa.

I represented the Institute of Food Technologists (US Adhering Body to IUFoST) and was endorsed by the Institute of Packaging Professionals at the **World Food Summit: five years later** (Rome, 2002). I presented “Expanding Global Food Supplies Without Increasing Production?” to the FAO at that forum which essentially presented the post-harvest component of food distribution.

A session keynote “Feeding the World – Opportunities Beyond Production” was presented at the World Food Congress XII which led to an interesting discussion. The approach had been to bring a team of experts to the LDC to assess and improve food distribution. Joe Hulse suggested difficulties in bringing in experts from the developed countries to show the LDCs how to do it. This approach is politically naïve. He and others suggested bringing in a training team to transfer food science skills to local leaders. Furthermore, Joe and other IUFoST delegates suggested that the local leaders chosen

should be women, who tend to be more attuned to food distribution to families. The proposal was modified to incorporate these principles, and also to propose a formal volunteer group of delegates from IUFOST to contribute to a Knowledge Resource Center (KRC). Members of the KRC would be willing to disseminate food science and technology to people from the LDC who have specific questions. Short requests would be volunteered through phone, fax or email. Longer requests and country visits could be arranged on a consulting basis. The KRC will be expanded to include other expertise such as packaging and transportation.

I made a presentation to the World Packaging Organisation in Basel, Switzerland through which I sought to include packaging skills into the proposed KRC. After the presentation, I was invited to present programs in Sri Lanka and Malaysia, which I accepted. During the visit to Sri Lanka, I found post-harvest work being done which exceeded anything I had experienced in the so-called “Developed World”. In fact, the Sri Lankan Institute of Post Harvest Technologies had been doing the assessments and improvements I had proposed. For example, 23 –28% losses were found in the distribution of fresh produce, and means were presented to reduce their total losses to 5%! I have since found institutes in other LDCs. The reality is that many LDC already have institutes and efforts to improve food protection and distribution. The difficulty is that these institutes both act and publish within their respective countries.

Let us return to Mr. Mortimer’s Call for Action. IUFOST has as members of its Adhering Bodies food science and technology expertise which spans the entire field. These experts include specific and product related expertise as well as broader experiences. I propose that we form a KRC which can offer specific skills to shorten implementation (through specific knowledge which need not be re-discovered) and thereby support these localized efforts. I also propose to utilize the IUFOST global network to identify synergies and additional areas which could benefit from the country specific programs. I further suggest bringing in other needed skills, such as packaging and transportation already mentioned, into the KRC. Economic and political expertise could also help identify other resources to aid implementation efforts.

So the specific call to action starts with volunteers for the KRC, that is, members of IUFOST Adhering Bodies who agree to:

- A) Volunteer to share knowledge within their expertise to requestors from the LDC (we could identify suitable requestors if deemed necessary) via telephone, facsimile and email,
- B) Consult, as appropriate on appropriate technologies which require either a substantial time commitment (*e.g.* require development) or require country visits,
- C) Share experiences with others through the FAO/IUFOST database.

The KRC will be a resource which pledges to help implement the good works already underway in the LDC. Other members of IUFOST will pledge to identify suitable post harvest institutes, learn what they are doing, and share successes and opportunities such that applied science and technology can be demonstrated to less scientifically trained individuals. We know, through both country and aggregate agricultural production (such as the FAO agricultural databases) that the world produces adequate food to feed its population. We also know that science and technology can protect and distribute this food in time and space required to feed the world’s population. We therefore already possess the tools, and, more importantly, within IUFOST. So this addendum to President Mortimer’s call for action is no less than a plan to meet the pledge of all member nations of the United Nations ***to reduce world hunger by 50% by the year 2015***. That is the call to action from the UN Food & Agricultural Organisation (from FAO World Food Summit 1996) and coincidentally also the declaration of IUFOST 7th General Assembly in Budapest (1993). We have the means, talents and opportunity to convert this pledge into a reality, and no better time exists than the present.