



“On Thursday, January 28, Haitian President Rene Preval came out in favor of strengthening national production, to the detriment of imports. According to the Chief of State, the sustainable solution to feeding more than one million victims is to encourage local production and create manual labor jobs, specifically in the agricultural sector.”

— Signal FM Radio
Haiti

BACKGROUND

Until the mid 1980s, Haiti was mostly self-sufficient in food production. Today nearly 70% of Haiti’s food is imported.

The majority of foreign aid received by Haiti over the last 20 years has been accompanied by conditions of “structural adjustment.” As a result, Haiti has been forced to lower its import tariffs from 35% to 3%. Practically, this means that Haiti is now the 4th largest importer of U.S.-produced rice, after Japan, Mexico, and Canada. Haiti’s local rice production has been devastated because Haitian farmers cannot compete with subsidized American rice flooding the local markets at a fraction of the price.

Structural adjustment policies and free trade agreements have restricted the Haitian government from subsidizing local agricultural production.

The reduction in rice production as well as other traditional agricultural sectors like sugar, chicken, and corn is recognized as a leading factor in rural to urban migration. In 1970, 20% of the Haitian population lived in urban centers compared to 47% in 2008. According to MCC partner Support Local Production (KPL), “Liberal trade agreements have crushed Haiti’s agriculture sectors and have significantly contributed to unemployment and rural-urban migration.”

TODAY

- Following the earthquake in Haiti, approximately 600,000 people migrated from Port-au-Prince to the countryside. To meet the needs of internally-displaced Haitians and work towards food security, an emphasis must be placed on rural agricultural development.
- Average household income in Haiti has decreased between 60 and 70 percent and food costs now account for 85% of total expenditures, compared to approximately 35% prior to the earthquake.
- As a result of the influx of food aid following the earthquake (more than 15,000 metric tons of donated American rice), the price of locally-produced rice and black beans have already dropped to below pre-earthquake prices. PAPDA, the Haitian Platform for Advocating Alternative Development, predicts that prices will continue to plummet to the continued detriment of Haitian farmers.
- At the end of January, Haitian president Rene Preval stated in an interview with PBS, “We cannot continue to rely on giving food to the population that comes from abroad, because we’re competing against our own national agriculture.”

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

“If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry...then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noon-day.”

–Isaiah 58:10

- Call on your government to provide Haiti with aid that supports and rebuilds local agricultural production by:
 - Allowing the Haitian government to regulate food imports
 - Advocating that the government legislate agricultural subsidies
 - Providing Haitian farmers with access to credit
 - Repairing and improving agricultural infrastructure
 - Ensuring that farmers have legal rights to their land
- Call on your government to ensure that development efforts focus on rural community and agricultural development and decentralization in order to provide sustainable livelihoods for the rest of the country.
- Request that food aid be locally purchased from Haitian agricultural cooperatives instead of imported.
- Request that all current loans be turned into grants, as the IMF has pledged, and that future grants and loans to Haiti do not come with any attached economic conditions. This will allow the Haitian government to set reconstruction and development priorities for itself.

HOW?

- In the U.S., go to <http://washington.mcc.org/congress> to find your Member of Congress. In Canada, go to <http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/index.asp?Language=E> to find your Member of Parliament. Write a letter, call, or visit to share your views.
- Send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
- Pray for wisdom in the halls of power as policy-makers determine how to continue responding to Haiti’s needs.
- Contribute to and join organizations that support sustainable development and economic reform for Haiti.
- Use this information sheet to explain the situation to family, friends or your church community and encourage them to use their voices for positive change in Haiti.

RESOURCES

- A short film about Haitian markets produced by MCC partner organization Kore Pwodiksyon Lokal (Support Local Production): <http://youtube.com/watch?v=npvx4F9JZyo>
- “Fault Lines: The Politics of Rebuilding Haiti,” a 23-minute documentary that discusses Haiti’s need for rural agricultural development: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=AuUt12usDVs&feature=fvsvr>
- “Focus on Haiti: The Politics of Rice Parts 1 and 2”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=866xSPHeGhQ&feature=fvst> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILLmoquqpAo&feature=channel> [HeGhQ&feature=fvst](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=866xSPHeGhQ&feature=fvst)

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