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World Bank wants farming to bounce back

The best way to tackle the worldwide food shortage is to raise farm productivity, the World Bank has said

POINTS TO PONDER

- Since 2005, the price of staple foods has jumped 80 per cent
- The surge in food prices could push 100 million people deeper into poverty.
- The poor are also facing higher energy costs
- Food price rise has also increased the risk of malnutrition
- The food crisis is particularly severe in poor South Asian countries
- In recent years, agricultural growth in South Asia has been less than 3 per cent
- Growth of yields of food crops has been stagnant around the world

2.1%: yields during the height of the 'green revolution' (1950-1990)

1.2%: yields since 1991

- Food prices in India are more stable than most of the world
- Traditionally India has kept domestic wheat and rice retail prices above international prices
- Now they now are 30-35 pc below world market prices
- Crop forecasts suggest that the region is likely to benefit from good rice and wheat harvests
- International wheat prices have fallen 40 pc compared to their peaks of February 2008

SOLUTIONS

Short term:

- Targeted subsidies: provide grains at lower costs directly to the poor
- Increase the amount of cash-transfers and the number of people receiving low-cost grains

Long term:

- Revival of Agriculture
- Agricultural R&D critical to enhance productivity
- Productive investments in agriculture needed
- A new deal for global food policy and agriculture

This New Deal should focus not only on hunger and malnutrition and access to food, but also on energy, crop yields, climate change, investment in agriculture, the marginalization of women, economic resiliency and growth.

ROBERT ZOELICK
World Bank president