

By Benjamin Welch

Nebraska News Service

LINCOLN—As the population of the world increases, so does the demand to feed the hungry. Catherine Bertini, 2003 World Food Prize Laureate and co-chair of the Global Agricultural Development Initiative at The Chicago Council of Global Affairs, spoke last Thursday at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln on “Where America Must Lead: Ensuring the World Can Feed Its People.”

“Catherine is a woman with tremendous expertise in feeding people and avoiding starvation in times of famine, war, natural disasters and other catastrophes,” said Ronnie Green, the vice chancellor for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Population is expected to rise from seven billion to nine billion by 2050. Africa will be home to two billion of these and is slated to see the fastest rate of increase.

To keep up with the population growth, food production will need to increase by 60 percent to meet the new demand. Price volatility, especially in war-torn countries, makes it hard to plant and sell crops.

“We have to think of where are markets going to be in the future and we have to think about where people are going to be,” Bertini said.

She also noted that 1.3 billion live in poverty and on less than \$1.25 a day.

As one of the nation’s top food producers, Nebraska farmers are expected to be major contributors to relief.

With only 12 percent of the world’s arable land remaining, Bertini said spreading farther out is not an option. Instead, major steps toward increased production are the only way to meet future food security pressures.

“Agriculture productivity is two to four times more effective than any other productivity in alleviating poverty,” Bertini said.

Among the productivity enhancements Bertini discussed was technology, like advancements in irrigation. In Africa, only six percent of the continent’s arable land is irrigated, compared to 37 percent in Asia.

She said that despite its toils, some of Africa is starting to see increases in output, specifically Angola after the end of its civil war.

Bertini also addressed the cultural gender gap.

“When the income comes into the household through the woman,” Bertini explained, “it’s much more likely to go to the betterment of the family rather than if it comes through the man.”

But because women do not have the same rights as men in most of Africa, they have less access to farming necessities like grain and monetary loans despite making up 43 percent of the workforce. Bertini said if women were granted these opportunities, the number of impoverished could drop between 100 million and 150 million.

The United States is part of a \$22 billion hunger-relief initiative by G8 countries. Bipartisan efforts like the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Lugar-Casey Global Food Security Act have been implemented, but Bertini said food relief is currently low on the U.S. agenda.

“In John Kennedy’s time, he said his vision was to put a man on the moon,” Bertini said. “Our vision could be to end world hunger in our lifetime.”