

World Trade Organization (WTO) This website provides the WTO's official interpretation of the events of the July 2006 Doha Round. www.wto.org

"Questions, concerns abound in aftermath of WTO Failure" Martin Khor of the Third World Network reflects on the suspension of the Doha Round. Khor is a highly respected international expert on the WTO. www.twinside.org.sg/title2/twninfor457.htm

Farm Subsidy Report. Washington Post. July 2006. This report offers us much to reflect upon as we examine the issues in the up-coming Congressional elections. It is part of a series that appeared in the Post on July 2,3,18 and 19. The power of all lobbies is an on-going reason to support campaign finance reform.

Environmental Working Group Data Base. This excellent web-site includes a data base that allows one to discover the names of the major recipients of subsidies. You can also learn which groups in your state received farm subsidies and how much they received. www.ewg.org/farm/

An Inconvenient Truth. This disturbing film, along with Al Gore's book by the same title, offers photo documentation of the effects of global warming. It is worth viewing and/or reading, as the reality of the environmental and social impact of global warming is setting the stage for a global crisis. Both the book and the film offer practical suggestions on what we can do about it, individually and collectively.

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CREA is an independent, faith-based 501(c)3 organization.



CREA

"Believing that the earth is home to all, CREA facilitates analysis of human, social and economic policies from the perspective of their effects on human lives, beginning with the lives of those who are poor."

CREA Mission Statement

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*We each bring to the effort
for positive change
our little bits.
Together, the little bits
add up
as the tiny drops of rain
add up to a river,
and the tiny flakes of snow
become a
tree's sparkling raiment.*



CREA

STARTING POINTS

Center for Reflection, Education and Action, Inc.

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WORKING FOR POSITIVE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE... AND FACING SETBACKS

In this issue of Starting Points we looks at some of the ups and downs of working for positive and social change on individual, collective and systemic levels. To reach the goal of a just and equitable world order, efforts on all levels are necessary and important. Energy and perseverance are required in these efforts, and the support of colleagues and friends is crucial.

Barbara Mainster, Executive Director (1972 to present)
Redlands Christian Migrants Association, Florida

If RCMA were listed on the New York Stock Exchange, we'd be the darling of Wall Street because buyers could count on a \$16 return for every \$1 invested. More precious than anything traded on the world markets, our commodity is children - children who might otherwise be forgotten because their parents are neither rich nor powerful. Our children are the sons and daughters of migrant farm workers and poor, rural parents.

Like suburban couples who send their kids to day care, our parents work hard, love their children, go to church on Sundays - and, of course, pay taxes. Yet in rural Florida, most private companies don't invest in day care. Their actuaries see no financial return.

Fortunately, other visionaries saw great potential for these young people, and in 1965 established RCMA to provide a safe, nurturing environment for the children while their parents labored in the fields. Over the years, various local, state and federal grants helped us broaden our reach to the point that we now serve over 6,000 children in 75 centers and two charter schools.

While we rely on an elaborate patchwork of government dollars, these resources are out of reach without matching funds from private donors. Our staff manages to squeeze \$16 in matches out of every dollar donated. Wall Street only dreams of such returns!

It's an investment, all right, a vital investment in our future. Myriad studies show the wisdom of investing in youth, to steer children toward productive, successful lives. At RCMA we spend an average \$7,500 per child per year, with days that last 10 to 11 hours. Many of the children are babies, requiring a staff: per child ratio of 1:4. The State of Florida, meanwhile, spends \$17,600 per prison inmate per year.

In this stark comparison, the wisdom of investing in our children becomes very clear. The potential payoffs are incalculable; the potential losses, tragic.

Patrick Neytes, Senior Advisor,
Vectra International, Brussels, Belgium

Change. Everybody is driven and acts by a set of personal and shared beliefs. These beliefs are shaped by significant events in our lives, people close to us as well as by the day-in, day-out exposure to circumstances which impact us gradually rather than traumatically. No matter where or how these beliefs originate they are grounded in a common base of faith.

Many of the different faiths have common values and these result in a universal set of rights, which we implicitly know yet hardly ever express in words. These rights are expressed clearly in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

I have rarely encountered someone who would disagree that these universal right should not be applied to themselves. Yet when reviewing many of the world's current data and my own personal experiences, I see that for many people these universal rights have been violated.

We all know the terrible facts of 25,000 people dying a day due to lack of clean drinking water, over one-third of the world's populations living under 1 dollar per day, many working in terrible conditions to manufacture goods sold to people they will never see and at a price which they could not afford.

Confronting this reality in many places around the planet crystallized within me a passion to enable positive change...change so very much needed!

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Rev. Michael Seifert
Pastor, San Filipe de Jesus Parish, Brownsville, Texas

In 1996 I was asked to found a parish in Cameron Park. I accepted the task with gladness. With thirteen miles of unpaved roads, no police, fire or postal service and with 1,500 families living in fear of those who traffic in drugs, arms and people, I figured Cameron Park could only get better. An ideal situation for building community.

Ten years later, the old Cameron Park is but a memory. The poverty remains, but the county and state have paved the roads. With public services in place, over a third of the residents improved their homes. Best of all, the community has acquired a notable civic pride, brought on by the means of change itself.

In 1996, the first pastoral goal of the new parish was to turn out the vote. In the '96 election, only 151 of those 1,500 registered voted. In four years, that changed to 1,000 voters, and the creation of a perception (not all that removed from reality) of an activist community.

Ironically, the change in voter behavior was not due to the quality of the candidates, but to a sense of entitlement on behalf of the community, the commitment of forty block captains, and the link, made weekly, to the Gospel.

"What keeps me going is my community: the people I live here with. In some sort of small way, our team here has managed to form a bit of a church - a true church - where there is a celebration of life that is wonderful to behold. In other words, all of us are always in a good mood - despite sickness, horrible work, problems with the children, etc. etc.

"There is a good bit of clinical depression in our neighborhood - but people still turn out, work, laugh together. Go figure!

"The same goes for me. I love living here: I love working with the groups on the other side of the border - despite setbacks, in the end, I find it wonderful to see folks.

We are friends.

"PS also the wonderful work that folks like you do. You wouldn't believe how much I speak about your work."

Patrick Neytes, Vectra International, Belgium
(Continued from page 1)

After many decades of systems learning and application we should by now have understood that all is connected. Making individual changes in respectful behavior towards self, others and the planet will positively change the existing global social and economic systems.

Change is difficult and in some cases can be traumatic. Most change is a gradual process of small behavioral steps which lead to difference in belief which in turn leads to system changes.

Acting with common faith and beliefs of connectedness and respect will create positive change. Each of us can operate with head, heart and hands.

Head. Understand that the current facts are real. People do die of hunger even if you do not see them, and systems connect us all.

Heart. Believe that each person is equally entitled to the rights each of us has: good, clean drinking water, shelter, medical care, safety from persecution, education, decent work with sustainable living wage...

Hands. Behave to others as you do to yourself... with respect.



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More information about Fair Trade-Peace Trade products will be in the next issue of StartingPoints

Jay Taylor. President. Taylor and Fulton Growers and Shippers. Palmetto, Florida

As chairman of the Florida Housing Finance Corporation I had the opportunity to speak to the Secretary of the Department of Community Affairs. I told him that the critical shortage of housing for farm workers in the state was one problem that could be cured. He was shocked, but I told him that the population of farm workers in the state was on a downward slope and that if the state would commit to increasing the supply of housing that the two lines would eventually intersect. During my tenure there we built over one hundred and fifty million dollars of farm worker housing and there is more on the way. There is no better way to improve and enhance the lives of the workers in the fields than to provide them with safe and affordable housing.

Because of the seasonal and transient nature of the fruit and vegetable industry, housing or the lack thereof is a prime concern of the workers. Will they have somewhere to stay at the next crop? Should they abandon the home they have to follow the seasons and earn extra money? Will their apartment be there and available when they return? These are all legitimate concerns that can be answered.

THE DOHA ROUND AND DEVELOPING NATIONS: IMPASSE ON SUBSIDIES BRINGS SUSPENSION OF TALKS

The Doha Round of the World Trade Organization (WTO) began in 2001. Its stated commitment was to develop trade rules correcting the trade-distorting subsidies and tariffs that presently make it difficult for poorer developing countries to enter the global market and lift themselves out of poverty.

International aid organizations and even the IMF and the World Bank have endorsed the reduction and gradual elimination of trade-distorting tariffs and subsidies as the single most important step toward reducing global poverty.

The Round offered much hope to poor countries. To their grave disappointment, the negotiations reached an impasse and in July 2006 were suspended indefinitely.

Many analyses of the suspension of the WTO Doha negotiations note that both the U.S. and the E.U. blame each other for not being flexible enough about the percentage reduction of domestic agricultural subsidies and the time frame for reductions. Contributing factors considered are the power of the farming lobbies in both the EU and the US, the expiration of the U.S. fast track policy in 2007 and the up-coming US elections.

A safe and affordable place to call home must be available on a reasonable basis.

The benefits of housing to the farm worker community are numerous and substantial. The first and foremost is the ability to travel and thus add to the weeks of employment a year with the commensurate rise in income. The social stigma that comes from not knowing where you or your family will sleep next disappears. A farm worker that is able to retain a constant stream of housing from location to location is a wage earner that becomes a contributor to the economic well being of a community instead of a burden.

In these days of record setting low unemployment figures, the availability of housing is a recruitment tool beyond compare. There is no "extra" money in farming today and payrolls are the largest single cost in the fruit and vegetable industry. Farm worker housing is truly an example of the state and business partnering to do well by doing good.

Let's hope that other states across this land will commit to the investment that Florida is now making and help create the stream of housing that will support the farmers and workers season in and season out.

A July Washington Post series (July 2,3,18,19) showed that the majority of the U.S. farm subsidies go to a relatively small number of farming establishments, and in some cases to farmers who are not planting the subsidized crop.

The Post cites the Environmental Working Group database for the following statistics. "In 2005, when pretax farm profits neared \$72 billion, the federal government dispensed more than \$25 billion in aid, almost 50% more than the amount it pays to families receiving welfare."

In the meantime, poverty-stricken, agriculture-based communities world-wide suffer.

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Sister Ruth attended the annual Stakeholder Council meeting in Amsterdam July 10-11, 2006. The meeting focused on the third revision (G3) of the guidelines for reporting on environmental and social sustainability issues. The Stakeholder Council discussed their critiques of this revision and referred them to the GRI Board. The G3 will be launched during an October GRI conference. Sister Ruth will be a presenter at the conference.