



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on November 17, 2009

UN 'Hunger' Summit in Rome

The United Nations has entered the climate change debate in an interesting way: "There can be no food security without climate security," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the World Summit on Food Security (aka, the "Hunger Summit") in Rome recently. There is an undeniable connection between climate and food production, although throughout most of human history a warm climate has been associated with large food surpluses. Europe, about one thousand years ago, was much warmer than Europe today.



The history of agriculture from that period shows that a much greater variety of agricultural crops grew in northern Europe during that time of relatively warm climate. Some climatologists have suggested that the spread of the Bubonic Plague in Europe was caused, at least in part, by the crop failures and subsequent reduction in the variety of diet caused by a general cooling of Europe.

The first great human civilizations arose in climates that were warm, and generally alongside a river basin to help irrigate and fertilize crops. These conditions generated huge agricultural surpluses. Throughout human history a relatively warm climate has always been essential for most of the crops upon which large human populations survive.

There have been exceptions, of course. Winter wheat, which grows in relatively dry, northern climates, is a significant source of food in the United States, Canada, and Russia. Certain crops, like potatoes and other tubers, are "winter crops" which grow well in Poland, Germany, Russia, Canada and the northern parts of the United States. But reliance upon these varieties of crops presents a much greater danger of real famine. The Irish Famine, perhaps the most pitiable natural disaster in modern European history, was directly caused because the Irish over-reliance upon the potato, which could support a large population in a cool climate — until the crop failed.

The United Nations "Hunger" Summit in Rome focused upon the putative losses of agricultural production in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. But those losses would not necessarily mean net losses of world food production. Real global warming would open up substantial areas of the planet's two largest nations, Russia and Canada, for food production. Global warming would also open up for areas of America, Europe, Japan and other temperate areas to more tropical crops they currently cannot grow without hothouses, hydroponic gardening, or other special support.

The conference did not address increased global production of food, which could easily outpace any loss of food production in relatively arid parts of the equatorial regions of the planet. Indeed, the focus of the summit seemed less a concern about a world food shortage as a concern about nations with food surpluses selling those surpluses to feed less productive nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Evidence of that reality can be adduced from the comments of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, who said: "We should fight against this new feudalism; we should put an end to this land grab in African countries." Libya, which sits astride a great deal of high grade oil in the middle of a desert, is an



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excellent example of a nation that can buy food on the open market quite easily.

There is also every reason to believe that if food in the world became scarce, free market forces could easily handle the problem. More farmland, more investment in equipment and chemicals, better strands of crops — all could increase global food production if the market price was high enough. Moreover, as Californians know more and more these days, food production is dramatically reduced by environmental overregulation. Relaxing the very sorts of government actions which the summit in Rome is advancing would increase food production.

The fundamental problem of hunger in Africa, Asia, and Latin America is not inadequate food production but rather poverty. Very few nations in the world are net exporters of food, but nations that are highly dependent or wholly dependent upon outside sources of food — Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Norway — also have some of the highest standards of living in the world. Their people do not go hungry.

Why are there many poor nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America? Cuba is an excellent example of the problem. Before Castro, the island nation was relatively prosperous. The Cuban people, including the relatively poor Cubans, had an adequate and varied diet. What happened to the Cuban people after Castro? There have been times in which sugar, the principal export of Cuba, was rationed. A nation with a wonderful climate for growing a wide variety of crops saw much of its population go hungry. Poverty created by ironclad state control has made Cuba poor. Half-way around the world, another island nation situated very much like Cuba, Taiwan, is prosperous and its people are not hungry. What is the difference between these two island nations? Not climate, but government. Not global warming, but market freedom. That fact, however, was not discussed much at the summit in Rome.

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