

FERTILIZER ... HUMANITARIAN AID?

Humanitarian aid is material or assistance provided for charitable purposes, typically in response to a crisis or natural disaster. Its primary purpose is to save lives and alleviate suffering. Much of the world's suffering from insufficient food occurs in sub-Saharan Africa. Andrew Youn, Senior Partner, Executive Director, and Co-founder of One Acre Fund, a not-for-profit corporation serving small-scale farmers in east Africa recently told delegates at the 2012 TFI World Fertilizer Conference "... that fertilizer is the most important humanitarian product."

I couldn't agree more.

Half the world's food production comes from fertilizer. Fertilizer feeds the soil that feeds the plants we all depend on. Fertilizer means food, not just more food, but better quality food, more nutritious food. Africa needs to use more fertilizer. Fertilizer will allow African farmers to double and triple their yields and take them from subsistence to surplus.

The old adage — give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime — applies to fertilizer. It's not enough to just provide fertilizer as humanitarian aid. When the giving stops, yields drop and the hunger returns. What is needed is to develop a fertilizer-based food production system that includes access to markets for the excess production farmers will get from fertilizer allowing them to purchase good seed, fertilizer, and other needed inputs from their earned profits. The production system must be economically sustainable, not just for the farmer, but also for the input supplier and other supporting businesses.

Fertilizer is the most important humanitarian tool. It will fuel the economic engine that will take subsistence farmers out of poverty. But farmers need more than access, they need to be trained on how to use fertilizer properly and how to integrate it with other good agronomic practices.

We have much to do ... fertilizer is part of the solution to world food security.



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