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### Gender, Interdisciplinarity and Global Food Crises

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# CORNHUSKER ECONOMICS

## Gender, Interdisciplinarity and Global Food Crises

| Market Report  | Yr<br>Ago | 4 Wks<br>Ago | 7/22/11  |
|--|-----------|--------------|----------|
| <b><u>Livestock and Products,</u></b>  |           |              |          |
| <b><u>Weekly Average</u></b>   |           |              |          |
| Nebraska Slaughter Steers,<br>35-65% Choice, Live Weight. . . . .                                | \$94.86   | \$112.37     | \$108.38 |
| Nebraska Feeder Steers,<br>Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb. . . . .                               | 137.25    | 149.00       | 148.00   |
| Nebraska Feeder Steers,<br>Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb. . . . .                                | 117.95    | 136.25       | 135.00   |
| Choice Boxed Beef,<br>600-750 lb. Carcass. . . . .   | 154.94    | 177.16       | 178.50   |
| Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price<br>Carcass, Negotiated. . . . .                                 | 77.63     | 99.47        | 98.93    |
| Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass,<br>51-52% Lean. . . . .                                    | 83.83     | 97.70        | 99.55    |
| Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy,<br>Wooled, South Dakota, Direct. . . . .                      | 122.00    | *            | 192.00   |
| National Carcass Lamb Cutout,<br>FOB. . . . .  | 310.37    | 402.81       | 408.30   |
| <b><u>Crops,</u></b>   |           |              |          |
| <b><u>Daily Spot Prices</u></b>  |           |              |          |
| Wheat, No. 1, H.W.<br>Imperial, bu. . . . .  | 4.45      | 6.43         | 6.95     |
| Corn, No. 2, Yellow<br>Omaha, bu. . . . .  | 3.37      | 6.62         | 7.28     |
| Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow<br>Omaha, bu. . . . .  | 9.94      | 13.36        | 13.80    |
| Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow<br>Dorchester, cwt. . . . .   | 5.64      | 10.54        | 11.79    |
| Oats, No. 2, Heavy<br>Minneapolis, MN, bu. . . . .   | 2.54      | 3.45         | 3.71     |
| <b><u>Feed</u></b>   |           |              |          |
| Alfalfa, Large Square Bales,<br>Good to Premium, RFV 160-185<br>Northeast Nebraska, ton. . . . . | 150.00    | 185.00       | 180.00   |
| Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good<br>Platte Valley, ton. . . . .                                       | *         | 135.00       | 135.00   |
| Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good<br>Nebraska, ton. . . . .  | 72.50     | 72.50        | 72.50    |
| Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture,<br>Nebraska Average. . . . .                              | 85.50     | 197.00       | 195.00   |
| Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture,<br>Nebraska Average. . . . .                             | 26.50     | 70.00        | 74.00    |
| <b>*No Market</b>  |           |              |          |

Higher education plays a pivotal role in analyzing and offering potential solutions to the world's problems, and seldom have the world's economic and social problems appeared more critical. As the world's population increases and faces the unpredictable effects of climate change and begins to come to terms with the possibility of peak oil and its implications, we face rising concerns about food security and global food crises.

As we work to address these growing concerns it is increasingly apparent that our research must be interdisciplinary in nature. Because women play critical roles in the supply and consumption of agricultural products, these interdisciplinary efforts must also focus on the gendered dimensions of these problems. Is higher education, which has developed as a network of associations that are largely discipline specific and utilizes a reward structure that eschews interdisciplinary contributions, prepared for the task? Can the disciplines of economics and agricultural economics successfully contribute solutions to these problems without paying more attention to gender issues? What can universities, government agencies and non-governmental organizations do to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and the utilization of gendered research?

The global food price crisis of 2007-08, which was followed by economic recession and financial crisis, foreshadowed the interconnectedness of food and energy policies and the vulnerability to rising food prices of the vast numbers of poor and chronically malnourished people throughout the world. Diminishing access to food for growing numbers of the poor in regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as land grabs by richer countries demonstrate the sense of urgency for examining the multifaceted nature of the growing food security problem. Women, as producers and consumers, and in their intimate role in the process of provisioning within the household, must be included at all stages in the analysis of solutions surrounding the growing food crisis.

Developing countries are dependent on agricultural production, and women smallholders produce a majority of the food grown in these developing countries. Although this varies by region, in Eastern Asia women comprise about 50 percent of agricultural labor (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2011). In many African countries women

comprise up to 70 percent of the agricultural labor, producing 60-80 percent of the food stuffs and processing almost 100 percent of basic food stuffs (FAO, 1996). Clearly, the status of women and their roles and participation in agricultural production activities are important.

The central role for women as critical determinants in the distribution of resources within the household is well documented. In his stunning article published in the *New York Times* entitled “More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing,” Amartya Sen (1990), reveals the human toll of gender inequality and lack of equal access to the basic resources for survival, especially in the early years of life. Further research by Klasen and Wink (2003), offers evidence to suggest that increased access to education and employment opportunities have reduced some of the gender bias, but that sex-selective abortions are on the rise. Most troubling, in areas plagued by famine and endemic hunger evidence suggests that when food is scarce, families will cut back on education and health services – erasing many of the gains made by women and children over the past decade.

Rising food prices hurt the poor and other marginalized groups, but women and girls are hurt disproportionately. More than half of those living in poverty throughout the world are women (e.g., in 2008 about 70 percent of those who lived in absolute poverty were women (Agarwal, 2010)). The poor in developing African countries spend 50-75 percent (and the poorest up to 100 percent) of their income on food (United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 2009, p.iii and p. 13). Increases in food prices for those whose budgets are taken up with basic provisioning are especially detrimental.

Women involved in agriculture have less access to productive resources, markets and services compared to men (FAO, 2011; Agarwal, 2010). Having less access to resources often results in lower productivity and returns for women, and hinders their contributions to the agricultural sector. The roles and status of women in agriculture are diverse, and vary based on region, ethnicity, age and social class. However, evidence of a gender gap in assets, inputs and services, such as land, livestock, labor, education, technology and financial services continues to be an ongoing concern.

**Figure: Cereal Yield and Gender Inequality**



\*SIGI (Social Institutions and Gender Index) is a measure of gender discrimination constructed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Source: FAO 2011.

What are the possible gains from reducing gender inequality? As the table above shows, countries with less gender inequality (SIGI groups 1-4) are able to achieve higher average

cereal yields. According to empirical studies conducted in many different countries, women farmers are found to be as efficient as men farmers when controlling for differences in resources (FAO, 2011). If women and men had the same access to resources, women could increase their yields by 20-30 percent, increasing the total agricultural output in the developing world by 2.5-4 percent, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people worldwide by 12-17 percent (FAO, 2011, p. 5). In 2010, 925 million people in the world were undernourished (FAO, 2011). Reducing the number of hungry people by 12-17 percent as a result of equal access to productive resources to women is not insignificant, and mechanisms to reduce this inequality must be found.

What can we do to provide ways to reduce the gender inequality in access to resources? In what ways can we improve the delivery of technology to women smallholders, thus reducing the resource gap and increasing the productivity of women? Research teams must include gender specialists familiar with gender schemas, cultural mores and legal rights for women, and better understand the ways women are integrated into economic opportunities such as value chains. Efforts to reduce future food crises require the inclusion of women in research, delivery and development of new agricultural products.

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