

WORLDWIDE youth



How can we use agriculture

to produce more food?

to generate food of better quality?

to improve people's nutrition and health?

In November 2010, IFPRI held a youth writing contest in preparation for the 2020 conference “Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health.” Young people ages 14 to 18 were asked to submit creative writing pieces on how the relationship between agriculture, nutrition, and health can be improved. Young men and women from more than 20 countries around the globe shared their ideas, passion, and visions for a world in which all people are well-nourished and healthy. Their messages inspire us all to reimagine agriculture for the betterment of the world’s most vulnerable people. The complete youth contest materials, including the winning essays and contestant videos, can be found on the 2020 conference website at <http://2020conference.ifpri.info/youth-writing-contest/>.



ANJELINE ANGELES

Winner

I live in Antipolo City with my mother, my father, and my younger 13-year-old brother. During my free time, I like hanging out with my family and friends, going out and watching a movie or just sitting with them and having a long chat. I am going to college next year, most probably at the University of the Philippines. I am planning to take up broadcast communication so that I can pursue my dream of becoming a writer or a journalist in the future.

(excerpt)

Our fourth year field trip was a visit to a farm in Tarlac. There we were able to experience how it was to be a farmer—even if it was for just a day. Off to the the fields we marched, complete with the straw hats, the rubber boots, the working gloves, and a sickle each. The farmers taught us how to cut off the stalks and neatly pile them on the ground to dry. At first it was a real struggle, but soon we got the hang of it.

Before long, we heard the bell telling us to stop. I remember standing up, stepping back and beaming at my pile of hard work with a sigh of content. And in my excitement I asked the farmer beside me, “Manong, about how many cups of rice does this pile make?” The farmer looked down at my precious pile of sweat and labor and said, “Oh that? About one.” I vowed at that very moment never to leave a single grain of rice on my plate ever again.

Realization number one: It is not easy to be a farmer. Upon further conversation with a family living in the area, I also learned that what they earn is not enough to pay for their daily necessities. I found it so ironic that they are the ones who provide the whole nation with rice, but are also the ones who sometimes go to bed without a single morsel of it to fill their empty stomachs.

When I first read that the theme of this contest was all about “agriculture,” “better food,” and “better health,” the first image that came into my mind was that of the baby of that family of farmers whom I met on that day. His body was thin and bony, but his head was big. Clearly, he suffered from malnourishment.

Realization number two: If agriculture would be used to produce better food and lead to better health, I think the first persons to help would be those who produce the food themselves: the farmers and their families.

And thus given this, I will waste no more time with my back stories and get down to business. The first solution I propose is the equal allocation of lands for the personal consumption of these farmers, and more provisions for their health and wellness. I think it is just right that the government provide more funds for the benefit of these farmers. After all, how can one expect a country to progress towards a healthier lifestyle if the main producers of its food do not experience healthy living conditions?

The second solution I propose is the cultivation of the unused agricultural lands in the country. In class we have learned that one of the real reasons for poverty in the Philippines is the overcrowding in the urban areas which is in turn caused by the under-cultivation of many wasted agricultural lands in the rural areas. If the government only allotted more funds for the cultivation of these lands and the provision of more efficient farming technologies, then everyone won't have to flock to the cities just to get a good job. Many may opt to settle in the rural areas as farmers. Not only will the lives of these people be improved, but so will the lives of those left in the city, for there will now be a more balanced distribution of space and resources.

Now looking back at what I have written above, I have realized that the solutions I have presented both rely on the government and the actions of those which are beyond my control. I am now realizing that these solutions seem so ideal; and that though they may be easy to explain and defend, they may not be so easy to carry out. And they will not be up to me.

Which is why I turn the challenge towards myself. What can I do to help? This seems like an even harder question. To help me answer this, I once more remember the image of the little malnourished baby. I remember the way his face lit up when we handed the Noche Buena package to his mother. It is nice to think that we at least gave them something to eat for Christmas. How I wish we could give them something to eat all year round. Which reminds me... I think there is a way we could have given them something to eat for more than a day...

To read Anjeline's full essay, visit: <http://2020conference.ifpri.info/youth-writing-contest/>



NYASHA MICHEL

Runner Up

I was born in Zimbabwe and then we moved to Switzerland when I was three and lived there for five years. We then moved to South Africa and are currently living in a small town called Kwambonambi. I live with my parents, Jörg and Janet. My mother Janet is Zimbabwean and my father Jörg is Swiss. I have one brother called Tafi (for short) who is 16 years old. I love riding, reading, tennis and writing (I have written a few stories). I also love playing with my seven little dogs. I am not sure where I would like to study yet, but I do want to study veterinary medicine and become a vet.

(excerpt) ...Sipho, who was vigorously taking notes, eagerly shot her hand up into the air. The teacher's face broke into a smile. "Yes, Sipho," she said, "please give us another point." Sipho beamed, "Well, Mrs. Young, I thought that perhaps if the air were cleaner and without pollution then maybe the plants would be healthier and stronger. I also have reflected that using bio-pesticides will keep away any pests that infest the plants. This will enable them to grow to greater sizes and to be healthier. Bio-pesticides can make important contributions to Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Foods are better in quality if they are grown in clean and good environments."

Mrs. Young's smile turned serious, "What you said was very mature and grown-up. If you carry on like this you will have to take over the class." Sipho looked at her earnestly, "My mother," she said, "my mother had a book about farming and agriculture. I could not stop reading it. I have always taken an interest in these things." Mrs. Young looked at her gravely, "Please stay back after this lesson, Sipho. I would like to talk to you."...

To read Nyasha's full essay, visit: <http://2020conference.ifpri.info/youth-writing-contest/>



EMILY HARKNESS

Runner Up

I live in the outer suburbs of Perth, Western Australia, approximately 30 minutes away from the city. Our family is small but sweet with just my parents, my older sister and I. When I'm not at school there's nothing I like to do more than spend time out with my sister or friends, or lose myself in a good book. I love how reading can open doors to new and exciting thoughts and hope to continue on with my own writing and one day become a professional writer. In the meantime, I'm aiming to graduate from high school and be accepted into the University of Western Australia.

(excerpt) ...When the dry season came, the heat was even worse, and I would carry a cup of water out to my father as he worked among the crops. My mother had given me strict instructions to fill the cup only halfway, and then carry it very carefully from the well to my father without spilling a drop. The task was so tedious that one day I decided to run to my father and turn the chore into a race. Halfway, though, I tripped and cut my knee, and the water spilled out of the cup and onto the dirt. Mother saw the whole thing and came over looking very upset.

"Mother, do not be upset. I will quickly go and fill the cup again!" I rose to my feet and retrieved the cup, ready to head towards the well. I had not taken more than a few steps, however, before Mother's voice stopped me in my tracks.

"No child, there is not enough water for that. Your father will just have to go another few hours without a drink now"...

To read Emily's full essay, visit: <http://2020conference.ifpri.info/youth-writing-contest/>

“quotes from other contestants”

It hits us that while we are complaining for more material comforts, kids in [developing] countries are just struggling to stay alive. - **Scarlett Yuan-Ling Ho, China**

Ever since a child, in a shallow and materialistic world, a man thinks only to “become somebody in life.” A man thinks only of a comfortable place in a 50-floor building. Few have in mind becoming, for example, a well-known farmer, who could come up with a revolutionary idea to improve our basic foods. However, most of these people, having such ideas and ideals become managers of huge factories that only produce food to be bought, not to keep us healthy. – **Ioana Lupu, Romania**

It needs to be realised that revolutionary technology gives money and that is what rules our world. We are powerless to huge corporations, so we cannot fight them directly. In my opinion the most uninvading and vastly successful solution is suggestion and compromise, leading to mutual advantage. – **Karol Pilichowski, Poland**

Why is it that farmers no longer wish to farm the land? Our farmers have left the fields and gone to find work in the big cities. They encourage their children to take up business courses in universities and work abroad or at international companies. They tell them that anything is better than being left on the fields. - **Frances Camille A. Quezon, the Phillipines**

When you bring the hunger problem down to its basics, the best way to combat it is through continuous education: education of the world, education of the hunger problem, education of those who contribute to combat hunger. Without education our world would have fallen apart millennia ago. It is education that destroyed terrible diseases like polio, societal mortal sins like slavery, and government failures like totalitarianism. If anything can solve the hunger problem, it will be education. - **Shaun Moran, USA**

This booklet was prepared for a global policy consultation, coordinated by IFPRI, on “Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health,” the centerpiece of which is an international conference in New Delhi, India, on February 10–12, 2011.

IFPRI gratefully acknowledges the support of the following conference sponsors:

- ◆ Asian Development Bank
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