



Speaker Summary Note

Keynote Speaker: **Sylvia Mathews Burwell**
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Title: **Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health**

Prime Minister Singh, President Kufuor, Ministers, Distinguished guests ...

I am truly honored to join all of you this evening to help kick off this important conference to discuss how we can tap the power of agriculture to help the world's poorest families lead healthier, more productive lives.

I am struck by what a wide range of dedicated professionals—from plant scientists to policymakers—we have assembled here.

Decisively combating undernutrition will require contributions from the fields of agriculture, health, water and sanitation, education, and social protection. It is my hope that this conference will foster greater collaboration between our areas of expertise and help us find solutions to the world's nutrition challenges.

While agriculture alone cannot defeat undernutrition, at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation we believe agriculture can play a bigger role than it has been in improving the diets of the world's poorest families.

Three-quarters of the world's poorest people get their food and income by farming small plots of land. If we can make smallholder farmers more productive and more profitable, we can have a massive impact on hunger, poverty, and nutrition.

Agriculture and nutrition are part of a virtuous cycle. Not only does increasing agricultural productivity improve the health of smallholder farmers through better nutrition, but healthier smallholder farmers are also more productive.

It's no surprise that a recent study shows that countries which pursue pro-agriculture policies have faster reductions in their stunting rates. Agricultural productivity has not only raised incomes, it has also reduced food prices, making it easier for the world's poorest people to feed their families.

And yet, while agriculture has done so much to combat malnutrition and undernutrition, we believe it can do much more.

It's not enough for us to just increase the *quantity* of food available to the world's most vulnerable communities, especially women and children. We must also improve the *quality* of their diets by ensuring they have access to diverse, nutritious foods.

Over 2 billion people in the world still suffer from poor nutrition.

Many countries with impressive gains in agricultural and economic growth have not experienced the full benefits of improved nutrition. India's tremendous economic achievements and dramatic increases in food production, for example, have not allowed it to break free from the challenges of chronic undernutrition and malnutrition among its poorest citizens.

I'd like to share three examples of how the Gates Foundation is working to realize agriculture's full potential to help overcome these nutrition challenges.

Through our work with HarvestPlus, we are supporting a game-changing effort to increase the levels of vitamin A, zinc, and iron in staple crops widely grown and consumed by the poor. By breeding higher levels of these vitamins and minerals into seven key crops—beans, cassava, maize, pearl millet, rice, sweet potato, and wheat—HarvestPlus aims to improve the nutrition of millions rural poor in Africa and Asia. The first high vitamin A sweet potato bred in Africa has been readily adopted by about 500,000 farming families over the last decade, helping to improve the health of their children. And over the next three years, HarvestPlus plans to release four more improved crops.

But we know that more nutritious crops are only beneficial if the world's poorest farming families have enough land and support to grow them. That's why we are working with RDI/Landesia, an organization securing land rights for the world's poorest families, to give women farmers access to land and training to help them grow nutritious foods to feed their families. By 2013, RDI/Landesia is on track to help 200,000 women farmers in West Bengal and Odisha become legal landowners, giving them the opportunity to grow homestead gardens that can help them build better, healthier lives for their families.

At the same time, we recognize there's a lot we still don't know about the links between agriculture and nutrition. To better understand why high levels of malnutrition in India persist despite sustained economic and agricultural growth, we have teamed up with the International Food Policy Research Institute to explore the links between agriculture and nutrition. This initiative is promoting platforms where agricultural experts, nutritionists, and other partners can address key knowledge gaps and drive changes that will accelerate the reduction of undernutrition in India.

Too often, even within our own foundation, we have not taken advantage of the linkages between our fields. Agricultural scientists and nutritionists have traditionally worked apart. But it's our belief that these sectors have a lot to learn from each other if we are to reach the common goal of improving nutrition.

Cooperation must start with conversation. I challenge all of you to use this conference to knock down the walls that separate your fields, share your knowledge and insights, and build new bridges that will lead us to better, healthier lives for the world's poor.

There's a saying we take to heart at the foundation, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

It's the goal of this gathering to go far, together.

So let the conversation begin.

Thank you.