

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition

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Summary:

Research, in its various ramifications, has been viewed continuously as an imperative for tangible achievement and progress, and for unshackling humanity and societies from the tentacles of hunger and energy deprivation. Our future in that regards depends on research.

There is universal convertibility of food to energy and vice-versa. Food is nothing more than a chemically stored energy for human and animal use, or fuel production. And we have to delicately balance this convertibility. Appropriate and prioritized researches, locally and globally, have the potential to ensure this is achieved with attendance benefit to villages, societies and the global village.

Essay:

One child dies every five seconds from hunger-related causes ⁽¹⁾. Within the time it will take to read this essay, 125 such deaths must have occurred. Almost 1 billion people in the world are unhappily hungry today, and living on the lowest rung of Abraham Maslow hierarchy of want. With hunger, their pre-occupation is food, and can not aim at self actualization, happiness or contentment.

Adelle Davis (1904–1974) posited that “Nutritional research, like a modern star of Bethlehem, brings hope that sickness need not be a part of life”. And for the deprived segment of humanity, Ernest Rutherford (1871–1937) counseled “We haven't got the money, so we've got to think!” meaning that humanity has to think and research its ways out of the catastrophic quagmire. Research, in its various ramifications, has been viewed as an imperative for progress, and for unshackling humanity and societies from the

tentacles of hunger and energy deprivation. Our future in that regards depends on research.

Going through journals, one is perplexed at the amazing volume of debate of whether food and energy scarcity is natural or man-made mal-distribution. Another heavy quantum of effort, whose opportunity cost is human life, is wasted on unnecessary researches and controversies. For example in a typical scientific journal in deprived society, there may be more controversies on new methods of classifying and prognosticating nutritional disorders, than on how to tackle such disorders or make available effective interventions . While such efforts go unimpeded, more brain damages occur to children, with consequent dependent, unproductive and unhappy childhood and adult lives.

Science has to its credit the betterment of world's condition in aspects of food production and energy generation. The remnants of these problems and other emerging miseries can equally be tackled by human mind and scientific experimentation. These researches should be viewed as more essential in the light of the challenges natural processes continue to hurl at us: new and re-emerging pestilence, environmental catastrophes and emerging crop diseases.

It is to the credit of research, that the first “Malthusian doom” was averted by the industrial revolution. Science has the potential avert the impending second doom of food and energy deprivation. Many staple food crops of poor countries are now “orphan crops” with no active researches at their protection. The occasional researches on them have yielded wonderful findings. For example, cassava with roots that are ten times the normal size have been produced by hybridising cassava (*Manihot esculenta*) with the related wild species *Manihot caerulescens*. The big challenge is to make this scientific leap timely available, with a view of enhancing farmers' and national prosperity and happiness.

The opulent segment of us may loathe Genetically Modified (GM) food. But to the starving many, the sage counsel: “a rich man should eat whenever he is hungry, and the poor man whenever and whatever he can” is apt. To the malnourished children that are common sight to those in poor countries, and brought to the occasional attention of the rest of the world by the media, there can be no greater fear and misery than the impending doom of death from complications of protein and calorie malnutrition. This calamity of deprivation has within it barbarous tentacles as much as 40 % of children in tropical and developing countries, representing one-third of world’s children. If they survive, their childhood is substituted by agony, hopes replaced by apprehension, and daily living equated to daily misery! Whatever long term fears we may entertain, can only be meaningful when they are balanced against these immediate gloomy realities.

GM food, a product of researches aimed at increasing crop yields, even if not accepted widely, can be encouraged for other utilizations. Since substantial proportion of world food goes in to bio-fuel, feeding cattle and other animals, GM food can take the pressure off the world’s food supply for such activities. If there is need for further caution, we can start a scientific “prospective cohort study”, and see the effect of such food on such animals. The use of GM food to make bio-fuels has not been challenged as posing any hazard to the world.

Further our quest for food security can be enhanced by thinking out of the ordinary. We already know that the predominant source of Vitamin D in humans is sunlight. Can we get other nutrients from the sun -of course not for ourselves, but for our pets and animals- if we can engineer by gene technology the necessary enzymes in them? This may let off pressure from global food supply in future. Human preparations are only cognizant of life intricacies up to our current stage, and are yet not all encompassing of current problems. If we over caution ourselves to inaction and stillness, we can not be prepared for eventualities, and will at the time of our desperation be

caught most unwary. Therefore having ideas and view as telescopic in to the future as this may come in handy one day.

Rabindranath Tagore, (1861-1941) a Nobel laureate adduced that "... Fate has allowed humanity such a pitifully meager coverlet, that in pulling it over one part of the world, another has to be left bare." Today, 80% of the world's food and energy production is consumed by the wealthiest 20%, often leading to obesity. Obesity has attendant negative consequence on health and human well being. A health education drive will enlighten people about need for balanced and moderate diet, which will make the crumbs of the affluent available to the deprived, with benefit to both sides.

Further, we need to appreciate the universal convertibility of food to energy and vice-versa. Food is nothing more than a chemically stored energy for human and animal use or fuel production. And we have to delicately balance this convertibility.

Appropriate and prioritized researches, locally and globally, have the potential to ensure this is achieved with attendance benefit to villages, societies and the global village.

Reference:

1. World Food Programme website , accessed 12th January, 2009 at http://www.wfp.org/country_brief/hunger_map/pdf/WFP_HMAP07_ENG_R.pdf