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Summary

Drastic increase in food and fuel prices has aroused the world's concerns, creating a global crisis and causing political and economical instability and social unrest in many nations. In face of energy crisis, to society, the article highlights the importance of alternative energy source, and investment in technology and people. In cope with food crisis, issues of safety nets, supply and demand of food, and food safety are mentioned. Finally, people, technology and governance are the prerequisites to sustainability. The Chinese word for 'crisis', wei ji, tells a truth – a time of crisis is also a time of opportunity.

Introduction

According to BBC News, between 2006 and 2008, the average world price for rice rose by 217%, wheat by 136%, maize by 125% and soybeans by 107%¹. Crude Oil prices had even peaked at \$147/ barrel in July 2008². It was a common phenomenon in mid of 2008 in South Asia that flocks of the already inflation-stricken people squeezed into a supermarket for a sack of bag. To brace a food and energy crisis, society must have measures in place to tackle the problems causing it, improving the living standards of the people. The Chinese word for 'crisis', wei ji, comprises two characters, 'wei' representing 'danger' and the other 'ji' representing 'opportunity'. This word highlights a truth – a time of crisis is also a time of opportunity, connoting optimistically society could conceive ways to elevate its well-being at difficult time of crisis. The article aims to share some means to achieve improvement in society in cope with the current food and energy crisis.

Seek Alternative Energy Sources

There are numerous factors resulting in the rise of energy price, for example, the escalating demand in developing nations i.e. China and India. In 2004, China accounted for 13.3 percent of world energy use compared to the North America at 27 percent³. Most nations still rely on importing fuels, the situation leading to energy insecurity and supply instability to a certain degree. In long runs, society should propose alternative sources of energy and renewable energy, such as hydroelectric power and wind power. By employing green energy, not only can society reap the benefits of diversifying energy sources, but this also mitigates climate change. The strategy of 'first develop, then clean up' might no longer be justifiable because of the mounting costs of environmental protection. Meanwhile, minimal use of coal as energy production is suggested to reduce greenhouse gases. Ultimately next generations are likely to gaze at a clean and blue sky.

Some time an innovative way of energy production happens at every corner of the globe. In Japan, scientists had recently invented a new means of electricity generation by using cattle's faeces ⁴, of which a greenhouse-gas-free chemical process decomposes the excreta. With heightening the production efficiency, it infers six to eight tons of the excrement a day can create three days electricity usage for a household. In Europe, Swedes in Halmstad have been studying about the heat generated at a crematorium, the energy thus heating some families through the freezing winter ⁵.

With food price spike, partly blamed as the increased demand for bio-fuel is, second and third generation bio-fuel undoubtedly is an alternative source of energy such as cellulosic ethanol and algae fuel ⁶. Some environmentalists would argue that second or even third generation bio-fuels may compete with other agriculture resources like water. There is no panacea to the problem but society should try to utilize such non-food crops as second generation bio-fuel in order to avoid exacerbating another problem – Food crisis.

Improve technology and Train a specialized labour

A workshop on Food and Fuel Prices held by international organizations in September 2008 pinpointed the oil price had drastically gone up to a record high due to the high energy production cost ⁷, which is resulted from awkward skills and equipment for production. The investment in technology and human resources is thus indispensable to ameliorate the situation in going forward.

The Earth is Hungry? Set up Safety Nets

As mentioned above, only few could not realize the mounting food price has deepened the poverty and worsened families' livelihoods. Society has to put in more money in bettering safety nets. Like a welfare program, it will protect the needy from the worst consequences of the present crisis. There are many ways like offering targeted cash transfers, e.g. subsidized food supply, food stamps or transport vouchers ⁷. This can ease the living problems facing many people. In times of rising prices, reductions in tariffs and taxes can provide some relief to consumers.

Supply and Demand

The greater the food demand, the higher the food price. To get rid of suffering from costly food, society can stimulate food grains supply by means of rendering price incentives to producers ⁸. A majority of farmlands are resumed to normal use for food but not for fuel only.

Better access to essential information like weather and agriculture technique i.e. irrigation is also essential to boosting food supply ^{7&8}. Food and agricultural science should be at top of agenda for discussion among political parties and universities. Trade reform and agriculture extension services in the medium term will be advantageous to increase food supply.

Food Crisis and Food Safety

Owing to pollution and climate change, food safety has drawn our attention to eating habits. News coverage from time to time warned people of the contaminated pork, egg, chicken and fish. In this tight food supply, we cannot lose any more on food, this fact aggravating the problem of food crisis. A stern monitoring system has to be in place to counter the risks.

To overcome the crisis, there is no elixir. However, people, technology, and governance are bound together crucially to serve the imperative of sustainability ⁹. This means with advanced technology and strict governance, the knowledgeable people can lead society to grow in a sustainable way no matter what the crisis is ahead. Opportunity still stands the chaos.

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