The United States and the European Community have paid little attention to the effects of their agricultural trade policies on hunger and development. During the last decade, for instance, European and U.S. policies sent the world sugar market into a tailspin, causing many Filipino and Caribbean sugar workers to lose their jobs. The United States' attempt to capture a larger share of the world rice market by slashing prices reduced family incomes for Thailand's two million rice producers. The EC's subsidized meat exports dried up markets in western and southern Africa for local producers, damaging rural economies.

International financial institutions also influence the agricultural policies of developing countries by the conditions they place on assistance. Coupled with the sale of U.S. and EC food imports at depressed prices, the conditioning of debt relief and development aid on open market policies has often discouraged basic food production in favor of export crops in developing countries. Nations with precarious economies which depend heavily on agricultural exports or imports are subject to the risk of market price fluctuations.

In a world where hunger remains a deadly reality, international trade arrangements should encourage developing countries to achieve and maintain a degree of food self-reliance, a conscious choice about which foodstuffs to produce domestically and which to import. International trade negotiations under the auspices of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) are critical in this regard. The GATT talks broke down last December over farm policy disputes, but negotiators now hope that the GATT proposals would handicap efforts of developing countries to improve their staple food production capacity.

Current GATT proposals would handicap efforts of developing countries to improve their staple food production capacity.