Access to an adequate supply of healthy food is a basic human right, yet as a result of unfair trade, production and distribution, today’s food system fails to provide equitable access to nutrition for nearly one in seven people. While the scourge of global hunger has many causes beyond our control, there are several structural inequities in the food system that ICCR addresses through its shareholder advocacy.

We see evidence of food injustice in land grabbing by institutions that rob small farmers of their livelihoods and their surrounding communities of sustenance. We witness the millions living in food insecure countries and exposed to famine as a result of the food bubbles created by commodities markets distorted by speculation. And here in the United States we see the injustice of a food and beverage industry that often tailors its product offerings and marketing messages to maximize profit at the expense of the health of our citizens.

The industrialization of our global food system has led to a host of unintended consequences, including the overuse of fertilizers, pesticides and antibiotics that poison our environment and compromise our health. It has also led to the mistreatment of animals and human rights violations in the food and agriculture sectors, and a rise in obesity and undernutrition and their associated diseases.

Together with our allies, ICCR staff and members are developing corporate engagement strategies that seek to reform and correct some of the structural injustices at the heart of our contemporary global food system, so that access to safe and healthy food is expanded and protected as both a human and a civil right.

**Farm Worker Prayer of Praise**

Bless the hands of the people of the earth,
The hands that plant the seed,
The hands that bind the harvest,
The hands that carry the burden of life.
Soften the hands of the oppressor and
Strengthen the hands of the oppressed.
Bless the hands of the workers,
Bless the hands of those in power above them
That the measure they deal will be tempered
With justice and compassion. Amen.
—United Farm Workers

**INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD**

While many of us live in areas where grocery stores, supermarkets and even farmers’ markets abound, and a rainbow assortment of fresh produce and safely produced meat and dairy products is available year-round, others live in neighborhoods where the food most readily available comes out of cans, packages or from fast food restaurants. Clearly, all food is not created equal and where you live has a whole lot to do with what you get to eat.

Said Lauren Compere of Boston Common Asset Management, “One of the ways ICCR is seeking ‘food justice’ is by questioning companies’ identification of low-income communities and communities of color as areas of revenue growth potential in developed markets. We want to make sure companies are integrating their growth goals with their stated goals of being responsive to the nutritional needs of their consumers.”

In dialogues with food and beverage companies, ICCR asks whether they are making their healthier options uniformly available, not just in different communities domestically, but wherever they operate internationally, and in emerging markets in particular.

In their engagements with food and beverage retailers, members are asking companies to set specific goals for increasing access to healthy food by using the federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative to open stores in underserved communities, report on their progress, and consult with groups such as The Food Trust, Policylink, and the Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA).

Said Ava Alkon, ICCR’s Associate Program Director for Food, “We want to ensure that retailers make their healthier offerings as, or more, affordable.

Said Makani Themba of the Praxis Project, “When it comes to healthy food and safe, green places to play, many families have few options. Too many communities are inundated by corner stores and junk food outlets, where it’s easier to get malt liquor and a pack of cigarettes than an apple. And as my grandmother would say, ‘that’s just too wrong to be right’.”
than their less healthy products. We’re also calling on companies to participate in new collaborative initiatives that unite business leaders and public health professionals behind the goal of marketing healthy products.”

Said Makani Themba of the Praxis Project, “When it comes to healthy food and safe, green places to play, many families have few options. There are thousands of neighborhoods across this country without any parks or public green spaces and too many communities with parks that are not adequately resourced. Access to healthy food is not much better. Too many communities are inundated by corner stores and junk food outlets. In thousands of neighborhoods nationwide, it’s easier to get malt liquor and a pack of cigarettes than an apple. And as my grandmother would say, ‘that’s just too wrong to be right’.”

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPPS) ADVANCING FOOD JUSTICE

Another strategy companies can deploy in countries suffering from high rates of under-nutrition is participation in public-private partnerships (PPPs) such as the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN). These “nutrition-specific” initiatives, including fortification of foods with micronutrients, can be extremely effective in reducing malnutrition and in promoting greater food justice, particularly when carried out in close consultation with local and national policymakers, health authorities, and representatives of affected populations.

But these initiatives aren’t without controversy. “We do not support the addition of nutrients to unhealthy products,” said Alkon. “Instead, we ask that companies which participate in public-private partnerships such as GAIN and SUN support efforts to institute safeguards against conflicts of interest, and integrate the human rights principles of accountability, participation, and non-discrimination in these PPPs’ governance, planning, and operations.”

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF LAND INVESTMENT

ICCR members have been among the first institutions to recognize the potential injustice of large-scale acquisition of land in developing countries for the purposes of food production and export. The current global food system pits large multinational food companies, seeking cheaper land to grow crops for their products, against small communities, already food and water insecure, in developing nations. Further exacerbating matters, institutional investors, lured by rising food and land prices, are also buying up huge tracts of land for purely speculative purposes. This is what is more commonly known as “land grabbing” and it’s not hard to figure out who comes out on top.

In a survey of top food and beverage companies, Oxfam’s Behind the Brand Scorecard (profiled on page 13) shows that few companies have clear supply chain policies to mitigate against the potential negative social impacts of their land investments. On a scale of 1-10, the best rating achieved by a company on land use was a 3 (poor). In our engagements with food companies, ICCR includes questions regarding land investments and our Recommended Guidelines for Responsible Land Investments outlines best practices that aim to ensure these investments remain just and nutrition-sensitive.

JUSTICE FOR THE HANDS THAT FEED US

The food system is the nation’s largest employer, accounting for roughly 20 million U.S. workers, or one-sixth of the nation’s workforce. Despite the importance of the sector to the American economy, food workers are among the lowest paid and overworked employees, due to the “race to the bottom” created by an industry that is focused on cheaper, faster food at the expense of human rights.

In their corporate dialogues, ICCR members ask companies to adopt policies on human rights and labor that are in accordance with the United Nations’ Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the International Labor Organization’s Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and, importantly, include confidential grievance mechanisms for workers.

For investors looking for new tools to help drive corporate progress towards a sustainable, humane food system, The Equitable Food Initiative Standard (profiled on page 12) includes many benchmarks on improved working conditions, pesticide management, and food safety that companies committed to ethical labor practices will want to formally integrate into their policies.

For more information on how ICCR is helping to create justice in the global food system visit our website www.iccr.org. To learn more about Oxfam’s Behind the Brands Scorecard and the Equitable Food Initiative Standard, see pages 12 and 13.