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# Head of the UNDP gets it right on agriculture

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The Chief Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme said today that world food security depended upon getting “back to basics” with agriculture.

Former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, who now heads the UNDP, spoke on what she saw as the solution to future food security problems. Responding to questions today on Zealand’s national radio show Nine to Noon, Ms. Clark said that “smarter farming and production has got to be part of the solution”.

When asked directly if she agreed with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s science advisor Dr. Nina Federoff that without GE (genetic engineering) the world would suffer future food shortages, she said “I don’t think GE is the solution to the food security problem.” Instead, Clark argued for more funding for agriculture that emphasised solutions to the problems faced by poor farmers. Public funding for extension services and agricultural research that improves productivity and yield had to increase rather than relying upon genetically modified organisms.

Ms. Clark could have been reading straight from the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), the internationally peer-reviewed World Bank and UN report published last year after winning endorsement from 58 governments. This report represents the work of the largest research effort to date on the history and future of modern agriculture. Consistent with Clark’s statements, the IAASTD also endorsed a renewed emphasis on technologies that have proven track records for improving yield, reducing external inputs into agroecosystems, preventing the conversion of more land for agriculture and helping agriculture to improve the lives of poor and subsistence farmers.

Those kinds of technologies include conventional crop breeding, agroecological methods for increasing soil moisture retention and decreasing erosion, and intensification using more diverse cropping strategies and cover crops rather than fossil fuel-intensive fertilizers and damaging monocultures.

The giant agrochemical and biotechnology companies, along with Federoff, have been advocating reduced regulation and broader uptake of GE in order to feed the world. Clark noted, however, that using crops for biofuel was competing with crops for food. She concluded that “I wouldn’t jump to the conclusion that modified crops were the answer.”

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