



# GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

## Progress toward a U.S. Governmentwide Strategy Is Under Way, but Approach Has Several Vulnerabilities

Highlights of [GAO-10-494T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

### Why GAO Did This Study

Global hunger continues to worsen despite world leaders' 1996 pledge—reaffirmed in 2000 and 2009—to halve hunger by 2015. To reverse this trend, in 2009 major donor countries pledged \$22 billion in a 3-year commitment to agriculture and food security in developing countries, of which \$3.5 billion is the U.S. share. This testimony addresses (1) the types and funding levels of food security programs and activities of relevant U.S. government agencies and (2) progress in developing an integrated U.S. governmentwide strategy to address global food insecurity and the strategy's potential vulnerabilities. This statement is based on a new GAO report being released at today's hearing ([GAO-10-352](#)).

### What GAO Recommends

The related GAO report recommends that the Secretary of State (1) develop an operational definition of food security that is accepted by all U.S. agencies and establish a methodology for reporting comprehensive data across agencies; and (2) collaborate with other agency heads to finalize a governmentwide strategy that delineates measures to mitigate the risks associated with the host country-led approach. The Departments of State, the Treasury, and Agriculture (USDA), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) generally concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-10-494T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or [melitot@gao.gov](mailto:melitot@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

The U.S. government supports a wide variety of programs and activities for global food security, but lacks readily available comprehensive data on funding. In response to GAO's data collection instrument to 10 agencies, 7 agencies reported funding for global food security in fiscal year 2008 (see figure below) based on the working definition GAO developed for this purpose with agency input. USAID and USDA reported the broadest array of programs and activities, while USAID, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Treasury, USDA, and State reported providing the highest levels of funding for food security. The 7 agencies together directed at least \$5 billion in fiscal year 2008 to global food security, with food aid accounting for about half of that funding. However, the actual total level of funding is likely greater. GAO's estimate does not account for all U.S. government funds targeting global food insecurity because the agencies lack (1) a commonly accepted governmentwide operational definition of global food security programs and activities as well as reporting requirements to routinely capture data on all relevant funds; and (2) data management systems to track and report food security funding comprehensively and consistently.



Source: GAO analysis of the agencies' responses to the data collection instrument and program documents.

The administration is making progress toward finalizing a governmentwide global food security strategy—expected to be released shortly—but its efforts are vulnerable to data weaknesses and risks associated with the strategy's host country-led approach. The administration has established interagency coordination mechanisms at headquarters in Washington, D.C., (see figure above) and is finalizing an implementation document and a results framework. However, the lack of readily available comprehensive data on current programs and funding levels may deprive decision makers of information on available resources and a firm baseline against which to plan. Furthermore, the host country-led approach, although promising, is vulnerable to (1) the weak capacity of host governments, which can limit their ability to sustain donor-funded efforts; (2) a shortage of expertise in agriculture and food security at U.S. agencies that could constrain efforts to help strengthen host government capacity; and (3) policy differences between host governments and donors, including the United States, which may complicate efforts to align donor assistance with host government strategies.