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Lugar bill aids farmers as well as world's poor

My view: Tim Solso

As an international company, Cummins long ago learned that opening the global marketplace to poor countries and promoting development through healthy and educated people results in better economic prosperity and more stable governments for the communities involved, as well as for those of us who live and work in the United States.

Unfortunately, in this age of plenty, more than 3 billion people in the world live on less than \$2 a day. And, according to the Initiative for Global Development, close to three-quarters of those people live in rural areas and rely on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Understandably, improving food security and agricultural incomes in these areas has long been a cornerstone of United States foreign policy. Yet our own agricultural policy and farm subsidies work against these stated goals.

This month, agriculture committees in Congress will begin work on the 2007 Farm Bill. Despite the name, this piece of legislation is about more than farming. It has important consequences for our farmers, but it will also affect our national security interests through its effect on international trade and economic stability in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The story of the 2007 Farm Bill actually began more than six years ago. Shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, world leaders began a new round of global trade negotiations in Doha, Qatar. The goal of the Doha Round was to place the interests of developing

countries at the center of global trade talks and to ensure that expanding trade would benefit even the smallest and poorest countries.

Unfortunately, the Doha talks have been stalled since last summer, due in part to obstacles created by the federal farm subsidy programs at the heart of the current 2002 Farm Bill. With the farm bill due to be rewritten this year, Congress can remove those obstacles, get the Doha talks back on track and make U. S. agriculture even more profitable by increasing access to markets.

Sen. Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind., has proposed a farm bill that would move the United States from the current trade-distorting system to a new, more modern approach that provides American farmers with a safety net tied more closely to market signals. It also increases support for farms that seek to better protect land, air and water resources.

In addition to passing the litmus test on trade, Sen. Lugar's proposal would also make a strong contribution to the alleviation of domestic and international hunger and increase the American farmer's contribution to our nation's energy needs.

While U.S. farm policy is bound up with the nation's standing in the global community, current farm policies are still rooted in a narrow, domestic vision of a farm economy that has its origins seven decades ago in the Depression era. Congress must not delay in acting to ensure a prosperous and growing domestic agriculture industry, while improving economic prospects for the poverty-stricken peoples around the world.

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