



Mongolia Facing food challenges

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Mongolia is one of the least populated countries in the world with only around 1.7 people per square kilometer. What holds it back from feeding its own people?



Is there enough food in Mongolia?

- Around 50% of Mongolians work as herders; only around 10% of land is suited to agriculture. The price of meat has doubled in the past year. The price of potatoes has increased more than three-fold – from 20 cents per kilo in 2007 to 70 cents per kilo now.
- Desertification, caused in part by over-grazing, is robbing inner Mongolia of farming land and pushing families to move towards cities in search of paid work. According to the government 36 percent of people are living on less than 68 US cents per day.
- Extreme weather conditions make both crops and herds a volatile investment. In 2005 the worst wheat crop on record forced Mongolia to increase expensive imports further to ensure enough food was available.
- As the price of home-raised meat has increased beyond the reach of families, consumption of vegetables like potatoes and carrots has meant a greater demand for imported vegetables, and therefore a price rise in these ingredients also.



Tumun-Ultzi and his sister are environmental refugees, forced to move away from their family's traditional herding lifestyle after drought and a cold winter reduced their herd to almost nothing. Now their parents must work for others to feed their own children, making them vulnerable for the first time to global market trends.

Source: FAO/UNICEF/UNDP Report
Joint Food Security Assessment Mission 2007
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/j9883e/j9883e00.htm>

Food costs and children

Some 70 percent of Mongolia's food is imported from China and the rising Chinese currency and costs of transporting food are making it much more expensive for parents to feed their children.

Children are already facing challenges of malnutrition in Mongolia. Around 13% of them are underweight and many suffer from other nutrition-based conditions such as skin disease and rickets.

The impact of rising food costs will be seen not only in increased malnutrition of children and their parents, but also in decisions made at a family level which affect children, for instance taking them out of school or sending them into exploitative labour.

	2007	April 2008
Bread	25 US cents	57 US cents
Rice / kg	51 US cents	68 US cents
Flour / kg	42 US cents	77 US cents
Milk	42 US cents	77 US cents
Tea	21 US cents	38 US cents
Beef / kg	1.7 US \$	3.3 US \$
Horse meat	1.5 US \$	2.05 US \$
Mutton / kg	1.3 US \$	2.4 US \$
Potato / kg	20 US cents	70 US cents
Carrots	30 US cents	70 US cents

Eating once a day

After Garangsuren, an 8 year old girl in Mongolia, comes home and does her homework, she has supper – her only meal of the day.

Tonight she sits with her father, Tsedeng, mother, Dulamjav, and her 2 younger sisters, Bulganchimeg (6) Nyamsuren (1) who also share their soup with a friend from the countryside who is staying with them to study in Ulaanbaatar.

Garangsuren's father brings home about US \$85 per month for making cement blocks used in the building trade. This is only seasonal work for about 6 months of the year. The other six months they have no income. Dulamjav stays at home to look after the children.

In the last year the price of bread and of most meat has doubled, and potatoes have gone from 20 cents a kilo to 70. They rent the ger in which they live for 4 US \$ per month and another 4 US \$ for electricity.

Before food prices rose they could enjoy a hearty soup with flour and meat. Now they don't have enough food. They cannot afford meat anymore – even during good times they can only afford intestine and stomach. Now their staple food consists of soup with flour and potatoes or porridge.

As the food prices increase it gets very difficult for Garangsuren to stay in school. Education is free in Mongolia but payment is needed for the school books, textbooks, school stationery and uniforms. As well, children who go hungry to school cannot concentrate for long and learn more slowly than other children.

When Garangsuren gets sick, has a headache or flu her mother takes her to the hospital but they have to get a loan from friends or relatives to pay for the medicine which comes to about US\$ 10. She also has to get a loan for firewood as they can only buy a limited amount of firewood.

Now they are required to get more loans to buy food or buy groceries on credit.

On a good day Garangsuren still only has one meal. Other days she can only drink tea or eat a fried piece of flour. She often goes hungry now.

World Vision calls for an increase in global food aid, alongside a commitment from wealthy nations to reduce agricultural subsidies and allow poor markets to access their markets without duties and quotas.

World Vision's response

Sponsorship through World Vision helps to keep children at school by providing them with notebooks, uniforms and other basic but expensive items. World Vision also helps families in sponsorship areas to increase their livelihood opportunities or improve their farming methods. A number of special projects operate to address food shortage problems:

Seeds and Tools

In 2007, 3735 families of 30 communities received gardening equipment and vegetable seeds as well as training and a manual to guide them in how to grow vegetables. The vegetables grown supply the participants' families; many are also able to sell their surplus at the local market to improve their income.

Lamb and Yak Project

To help restore herds of livestock in the Zavkhan Province, last year 40 herding families each received 20 new lambs and 20 families each received 3 yak cows with calf. After three years each family will give back seven lambs or two yaks to the project to be transferred to another vulnerable herding family.

Arkhangai Food Security Enhancement

The goal of this project is to enable families to adapt to changing environmental conditions with alternative farming solutions. Last year 500 families took part in the project, which covered family and farm gardening, planning, processing and storage. Between them they harvested over 200,000 kilograms of vegetables, enough for five months of consumption to see them through winter.

Nutrition Project

World Vision's successful nutrition project has been operating since 2004. Last year, World Vision printed pamphlets and "mother's manuals", as well as using television to spread awareness of children's health, with four different campaigns on iron syrup, iron tablets, "sprinkles" and Vitamin D. Over one million sachets of sprinkles (micro-nutrients to protect against vitamin deficiencies and rickets) were distributed in 2007 to children aged between 6 and 36 months.

Herder Livelihood Diversification Project (HLDP)

This project extends agricultural training and basic literacy to herders dependent on traditional lifestyles for survival. Families learn to build greenhouses and grow their own vegetables to add to their diets year-round. Last year's harvest as a result of this project was estimated at 746 million kilograms from over 150 farming cooperatives throughout the target area.



For further information on World Vision's efforts of food security in Mongolia:

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