

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing on Right to Food

September 23, 2021 – 10:00 a.m.

Virtual on WebEx

Statement of Amb. Christopher Goldthwait
Chairman of the Board of Directors
GrainPro Inc

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your attention to the Right to Food--three deceptively small words which represent a critical, daunting, and growing global challenge.

I believe the U.S. private sector has an important role to play in taking action to achieve the Right to Food—and that effort takes all of us.

I'd like to share with you what my American company--one which is active in Central America-- is doing to address hunger, in the hope our work can be a model for others.

My name is Christopher Goldthwait, and I spent much of my career working with agriculture around the world as US Ambassador to Chad and with the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service.

Today, I'm the Chairman of the Board of Directors of GrainPro. GrainPro is a growing and profitable ESG company that through our commercial and charitable activities contributes to the achievement of seven of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially No. 2: "Zero Hunger." We are committed to producing solutions which reduce food losses and improve food quality for people around the world, and we know more lives than ever depend upon that commitment.

This summer, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations' annual report on food security and nutrition estimated nearly one in three people in the world did not have access to enough food in 2020. The increase in just one year was as much as the last five years combined. The report stated, "The world is at a critical juncture" and called for bold action.

We've learned at GrainPro that bold action can come in the form of simple changes to the way things have always been done. Our business is manufacturing hermetic—or airtight-- storage systems for agricultural commodities.

In technical terms, hermetic storage protects quality and extends the safe storage period for commodities and acts as an organic pest control without the use of toxic chemicals. Hermetic storage also supports progress on SDG Target 12.3, which focuses on responsible production and consumption. About one-third of all food people could consume is instead lost in producing countries or wasted in consuming countries after harvest. GrainPro technology helps prevent food loss and feed more people.

In practical terms, our storage systems mean smallholder farmers can use hermetic technology to replace traditional storage modes such as jute bags which leave their crops susceptible to insects, moisture and other things which destroy quality. Reducing post-harvest loss means farmers have more to sell, more to feed their families, and the option to hold their crops longer after harvest, selling when they choose at often-higher prices. The average return on investment in one hermetic bag is 4x in just one season.

In real terms, this means real change for families. One of our customers who grows maize says changing his grain storage methods helped him erase losses of about 100 kilograms of maize every year to rodents and weevils. He used the money from selling that maize to buy three cows, and the money

from those cows helped him buy three more. Now he can feed his family with milk and meat, and he says the grain they use for food is healthier. The family bought a television, expanded their house, and bought shoes for their children to wear to school. That's change for one family---yet so many more need that same opportunity.

The FAO report I referenced a moment ago says 60 million people in the Caribbean and Latin America were undernourished in 2020. We are well aware of the challenges undernourishment presents. Central America is an important market for us. The coffee industry uses our bags for the transport of coffee from the farm to the point of export. Exporters use our container liners for the transport of the coffee on to North America or Europe.

But our business is not sustainable if the smallholder farmers who grow the coffee cannot achieve food security for their own families. Farmers need to improve productivity and, through our systems, the quality of their cash crop. These stewards of the land need support to learn how to evolve farming methods developed over generations to meet new needs brought by climate change, expanding populations, and global economies. That takes work.

Diana Osorto is a Honduras resident who works for SEAGRO, an agricultural service company which is a distributor of GrainPro products. Diana tells us, "The change of technology for smallholder farmers is a very, very difficult thing. You have to work a lot using the language of a farmer and their farm."

We know the strongest language is that which demonstrates success. One of our customers, Edwin Martinez, is CEO of Onyx Coffee based out of Bellingham, Washington. Edwin's company is a global source of Guatemalan coffees, with warehouses on both US West and East Coasts. He works with about 200 farmers from five dozen families in Guatemala to bring their coffees to the world.

Edwin says at first some farmers wondered if hermetic technology was worth adding to their production costs—profit margins were already tight. Yet, when buyers and customers started requiring that technology, exporters began to see they could sell premium products at higher prices. Now the post-harvest hermetic solution is part of standard operating procedure.

These success stories encourage and motivate us to partner to do more. GrainPro partners with Food4Farmers, which is a Vermont-based non-profit development organization, to work with Central American farmers on improved food production.

Food4Farmers works with organizations which represent more than 8,000 coffee-farming families, and it has achieved remarkable results-- helping families establish home gardens, organizing farmers markets, educating about seed saving and exchanging, revitalizing traditional crops, and promoting water and soil conservation.

Again—big success comes on the micro-level—in just one example in Colombia, Food4Farmers worked with one of their partners to launch a program which helped nearly 100 families start guinea pig farms. Families had a healthy new protein for food and a compost for their gardens.

GrainPro will now ensure that these achievements extend to Central American coffee farmers, beginning with a project in Guatemala.

This is a win-win-win situation.

It's good for the business of an American company.

It's good for the coffee farmers.

And it is good for the U.S. consumers who enjoy high quality coffee.

We know those consumers getting their daily caffeine fix are probably thinking more about the next Zoom call, or school carpool, or errand run, than they are thinking about the farmers who raised those coffee beans.

Yet our lifestyles cannot happen without ensuring the harvests of farmers in Central America and around the world are safely stored. We need each other.

That's sustainability, and that's the way to work towards zero hunger.

On behalf of our partners at Food4Farmers, and all my colleagues at GrainPro, I want to thank you and the committee for your commitment to the Right For Food. We stand ready to help in this critical effort to ensure those who grow our food also have the security of knowing from where their next meal will come.