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Correspondence: Poverty

Hunger fuels profits

Sir: On your November home page you quote James Cusick of *The Independent* as saying: 'The United Nations, aid agencies and the British Government have lined up to attack Glencore, the world's largest commodities trading company, after it described the current global food crisis and soaring world prices as a "good" business opportunity. Glencore's director of agriculture trading, Chris Mahoney, had said: "The environment is a good one. High prices; lots of volatility; a lot of dislocation; tightness; a lot of arbitrage opportunities. We will be able to provide the world with solutions... and that should also be good for Glencore".'

As an economist as well as a public health nutritionist, I can confirm that this is accurate. The paradox that hunger increases profits for big business is true. Long ago, when there was extensive controversy about food reserves, Shlomo Reutlinger of the World Bank agriculture and rural development department, with a number of other economists and key actors in the food and trade world, showed that price fluctuations led to much greater profits for the food exporting countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, Argentina and Brazil.

These fluctuations greatly benefit greatly rich nations. This is why we could never achieve a global food reserve. They also greatly benefit corporate traders who thrive

on uncertainty in commodity markets and their advanced information systems. The real political issue is that these price increases and fluctuations will be enhanced by two phenomena. These are first, global warming and all the weather fluctuations, and second, sharply rising production and consumption of animal source food notably throughout Asia and the Middle East.

Three and four decades ago we at least debated and discussed this major issue. Today we ignore it.

Worse, all of the chemically produced ultra-processed food and drink products containing minimal real food get relatively cheaper over time. So we face the double whammy: food insecurity and hunger in grossly inequitable circumstances, and also rocketing rates of obesity, and diabetes and other diseases.

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