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**Statement by Wade Cowan, President
American Soybean Association
before the Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives**

September 30, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am Wade Cowan, a soybean farmer from Brownfield, Texas, and President of the American Soybean Association. We thank you for this opportunity to testify on the important role that U.S. farmers play in providing international food assistance, and the importance of addressing global food security in coming years.

The Food for Peace Program

Since the inception of the Food for Peace program in 1954, U.S. farmers have played a vital role in ensuring the availability, quality and nutritional value of commodities that feed the world's hungry. The American Soybean Association has a long history of supporting U.S. in-kind food assistance. Soybeans and soy products have been staples in the Food for Peace Program, which has provided food for more than 57 million people in 46 countries experiencing crises.

U.S. commodities have been the backbone of the Food for Peace program's success in alleviating hunger in both emergency and development situations. USAID and USDA have established a strong framework to ensure that commodities procured from U.S. farmers and processed, easily-used foods are shipped overseas to meet the needs of hungry people. This framework represents both the bounty of U.S. agriculture and the compassion of the American people. ASA strongly supports the use of U.S. commodities in emergency and development assistance, and opposes cuts in developmental food aid funding to offset shortfalls in emergency assistance.

Along with other farm organizations and the Congressional Agriculture Committees, ASA participated in a comprehensive review of the food aid program during consideration of the 2014 Farm Bill. After much debate among all interested parties, the Farm Bill included changes to the Food for Peace program, as well as inclusion of a new Local and Regional Procurement Program at USDA. These changes are still being implemented by both USDA and USAID, and their benefits remain under review. Accordingly, ASA believes it would be premature to reopen the Farm Bill and change the Food for Peace program yet again before a full assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of these recently enacted reforms can be assessed.

Agriculture's Role in International Development Assistance

Mr. Chairman, I would like to comment briefly on the important role U.S. agriculture plays in international development assistance, and on the importance of enhancing this role. As this Committee knows, agriculture is the foundation of a nation's broader economy. The more successful a country's farmers and ranchers are in providing food and fiber, the more its society can diversify into other enterprises. And the more affluent a country becomes, the better able it is to improve its diet, including by importing agricultural products from the U.S. This model has worked for developed and for emerging market economies alike.

Where it hasn't worked to date is in the poorest countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In some of these countries, as much as 80 percent of the population is engaged in subsistence farming, where a family is barely able to feed itself, much less provide food for others. These are also the countries where population growth is the highest, and where demographic pressures over the next 20 to 30 years risk outstripping economic growth and humanitarian assistance, destabilizing civil society and increasing political unrest.

ASA believes U.S. agriculture has much to contribute toward addressing this looming crisis. The Department of Agriculture, its extension service, and our land grant institutions are well equipped to assist small holder farmers in increasing their yields and productivity. Our farmers have practical know-how and our agribusinesses have experience in how to build local markets. These resources can and must be more directly focused on the needs of the poorest countries through international development assistance efforts.

Efforts to Support Global Food Security in Fragile Economies

ASA has been working for the last 15 years through the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health, or WISHH, to achieve these goals. WISHH recently concluded projects in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Liberia, and is working in Ghana, Mozambique, Pakistan, and other countries to develop soy, food, feed and livestock value chains. More broadly, ASA has helped form a coalition of farm organizations, agriculture-based foundations, and development implementers to push for a more central role for USDA and our agricultural system in U.S. international development programs.

Our coalition recently sent a letter asking your Committee, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and your counterparts in the Senate, to codify the role of USDA through a whole-of-government approach to global food security. It is important for the Secretary of Agriculture to have a seat at the table with the Administrator of USAID in developing and implementing international development policies and programs that are focused on agriculture. We also believe that U.S. agricultural institutions and organizations that are guided by farmers – including our own WISHH program – can play a very important and positive role in helping to transform agricultural systems and markets in food-insecure countries.

Mr. Chairman, we stand ready to work with your Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee to move legislation forward that will achieve a truly whole-of-government approach to global food security. Given the urgent and growing food insecurity of poor countries abroad and the need to make the most efficient use of limited resources, we believe this is an important priority that Congress should act on in the coming months.