



Agribusiness is Very Sensitive

A few weeks ago, [I posted about the Obama Administration's effort to change outrageous and wasteful food aid rules](#) that line the pockets of agribusiness and shipping companies. The more you look at the absurd policy preventing USAID from purchasing food locally for famine relief, the worse it looks: it wastes money, it prevents getting food to people that need it, it undermines local agriculture, and it despoils the environment.

I didn't think it could get any worse. But the lobbyists have outdone even themselves this time! [Reuters has the story today](#):

A White House plan to modernize the major U.S. food aid program, by donating cash rather than American-grown food, is in trouble after fierce lobbying by farm groups, food processors, shippers and others who set out to sink the idea months before it was unveiled in President [Barack Obama's](#) fiscal 2014 budget...

In pressing the case to shift more aid to a cash system, the White House and the U.S. Agency for International Development have highlighted the potential ability to feed up to 4 million more needy people each year at a lower cost. Several major aid groups, including Oxfam America and CARE, favor such changes....

Commodities shipped under the Food for Peace program "currently account for less than two tenths of one percent of U.S. agricultural production and about one half of one percent of U.S. agricultural exports," the White House estimated.

"Exports via food aid are a small drop in the market," said Veronica Nigh, an economist with the American Farm Bureau Federation. ***"Our concern is less about decreasing an important revenue stream for U.S. agriculture. It's more about the loss of a sense of pride."***

Well, how touching. All these commodity groups, agribusinesses, shippers, and food processors don't stand to lose much money, and they admit it. But you see, they will *lose their sense of pride*. Obviously, then, 4 million people should go hungry.

What's more outrageous? That we have such a policy; that those who support it can so blithely make these kinds of arguments; or that they might still win? Inquiring minds want to know. In the meantime, this is a no-brainer: the current system is about the purest form

of special interest legislation conceivable. [In Kevin Drum's words](#), "Call your congress critter today and tell them, for once in their benighted careers, to just suck it up and do the right thing."