MEETING THE DEMAND for food and an adequate diet for the people of the world is one of the greatest challenges facing the global community. The current world population is something more than six billion. It is expected to rise to between nine and ten billion people by 2050. Even today an estimated eight hundred million are hungry, undernourished, or malnourished. The challenge is made even more demanding by the necessity of meeting the need for food while sustaining and enhancing the resource, the environmental base, on which human society and the ecosystem depend.

A host of interrelated issues will be encountered in trying to achieve the objective of providing food and a nutritious diet to every man, woman, and child on the planet. These range from Matthew’s law to principles of agronomy. A very brief list of some of the broad categories of demands and issues includes

- techniques and technology to increase productivity ranging from genetically modified plants to water and fertilizer
- measures to combat pests, pathogens, and disease
- potential degradation of land and water quality
- international trade
- intellectual property rights and monopoly power

The symposium is designed to explore a number of these issues, in part from a historical perspective. The initial papers begin with an appraisal of the Green Revolution, which is followed by consideration of several modern aspects of plant breeding and genetics. Current institutions and international policies dealing with trade and patents are

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1 Read 13 November 2004, as part of the symposium “Current Issues in Agriculture.”
the focus of the third paper, while the last compares the successes of
the post–World War II era with the prospects for the future.

Important as they are, in an urban world, public discussion and
understanding of agricultural issues are limited. Similarly, while a brief
symposium cannot do justice to the topic, I hope that these excellent
papers will provide both a framework within which to evaluate some
of the issues and a stimulus to sharper inquiry.