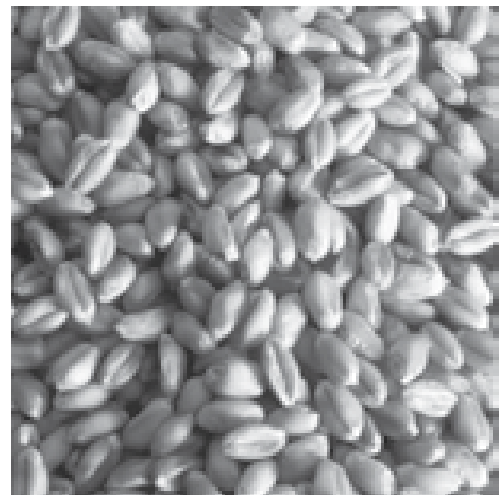


MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

This edition of Manna Matters is loosely gathered around the issue that underpins all economics: food. In ‘Bible & Economy’ (pp.2-3) we explore the story of the manna in the wilderness, a story foundational to Biblical economics. In both the ‘Aid & Development’ (pp.4-5) and ‘Understanding the Times’ (pp.6-7) sections we get a picture of just how far we are from the Biblical vision: Samantha Baker-Evens gives a personal reflection on the impact of the food crisis in Cambodia, and Jonathan Cornford explores the causes of the crisis at the global level. Finally, in ‘Home Economics’ Kim Cornford diarises her experience of undertaking the 100-mile diet in an effort to come to grips with where our food comes from. We hope it provides some food for thought.



News from Manna Gum

Having been ‘commissioned’ in March, we are now well and truly into the swing of things. We have appreciated the interest shown by many who have asked us how things are going. It seems like a simple question, but we have often been unsure how to answer – in a lot of ways it feels too early to tell as the big questions around longer-term viability will take time to clarify.

Perhaps the simple answer is that right now we are enjoying it immensely. We have been able to pursue the mix of work that is largely the reason behind the creation of Manna Gum, which includes: speaking and teaching about a range of issues to do with faith and economy, and especially what the Bible has to say; writing theologically for a broader Christian audience; raising awareness (through speaking and writing) about injustice in the poorer countries of the world and how this relates to how we in the West live; continuing to be actively involved in advocacy and campaigning around some of these issues (currently this is mainly in the form of the Save the Mekong Campaign); and working in partnership with friends and colleagues in other Christian agencies, churches and secular development organisations. This has been very satisfying for us, although it has also

made clear that we will have to be careful about over-extending the breadth of our work.

From a family perspective, it has been a great blessing. Although our working hours have not changed greatly (about 3 days for Jonathan and 1 day for Kim), having our office at the Footscray Church of Christ, two minutes walk from our house, allows a lovely connection between work and home life while still providing space to get things done! How the ministry of Manna Gum integrates with our family life is of critical importance to us, because in large part it is what the ministry is about – the medium is the message!

Not surprisingly, the biggest question is whether Manna Gum will be financially viable. After an encouraging start, there have been few new supporters sign up in recent months. Luckily we have just secured funding for one of our research projects on aid (see p.9) that will tide us over for the next few months, but we will need to significantly increase our supporter base by the end of the year. Please see the financial appeal on the last page.

Kim & Jonathan Cornford

(News in detail, p.9)

None shall have too much ...

The strange economics of manna in the wilderness

by Jonathan Cornford

To live we must eat food. But how shall we get it? This is what John Maynard Keynes called ‘the economic problem’. But if food is basic to life, then this is also a religious problem. In the Old Testament account of Israel, coming to terms with this problem lay at the root of the nation’s birth.


The story of how the wandering Israelites were sustained in the wilderness by manna from heaven (Exodus 16) is a Sunday school favourite. Yet the story of the manna is one of those foundational stories of the Bible; once you pay attention, you start to see references to it everywhere. And it is all about economics. Unfortunately, it is a story that hardly makes it out of the Sunday school room.

The essential background to this story lies in the fact that the Israelites have just been liberated from slavery in Egypt where they were building Pharaoh’s great store cities. There, they had been part of an economic system that had made amazing technological leaps and produced enormous surpluses of wealth; but it had done so at the cost of extreme inequality and the enslavement of large sections of the population.

After a dramatic escape, the Israelites find themselves wandering in the wilderness of Sinai. They are free of their servitude to the Egyptian economy, but they are at a loss to know how they should now live. Just like the addict who is terrified by the unknowns of a new life, they begin to contemplate returning to the slavery of Egypt: “There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted ...” (Ex 16:3).

It is here that the Israelites are offered a strange new economy, one based on ‘bread from heaven’ (v.4), and the perplexity of the Israelites is underscored by their naming the bread *manna*, meaning ‘What is it?’ (v.31). However, there are rules associated with this new system:

1. ‘Each one is to gather as much as is needed’ (v.16) – this is an economy based on everyone achieving *enough* rather than everyone pursuing unlimited wants. Not only is it important that none have ‘too little’, it is also important that none have ‘too much’. Within this framework, the provision of manna is *abundant* – there is no need to compete.
2. Don’t store it up – in the manna economy, stored wealth turns rotten (v.19-20).
3. Sabbath rest – everyone has a right, even a need, to rest from work and to stop and think about what they are doing. Not only is this a radical industrial relations policy in the ancient world, it is also a statement of the underlying *abundance* of God’s economy – it is not necessary to work all the time. Perhaps most importantly, it enforces recognition of the greater truth that ‘man does not live by bread alone’ (Deuteronomy 8:3).



... this is an economy based on everyone achieving *enough* rather than everyone pursuing unlimited wants. Not only is it important that none have ‘too little’, it is also important that none have ‘too much’.

... it is also a statement of the underlying abundance of God’s economy.

Needless to say, the principles of the manna economy are the exact opposite of the Egyptian economy from which they have just been liberated. Not only do the Israelites have to learn a new way of living, they have to *unlearn* the old way, and as the story indicates, this is not easy for them. In fact, in Deuteronomy 8 we learn that the Israelites *needed* to learn the lessons of the manna economy before they could enter 'the Promised Land'.

The lessons of the manna economy echo through the life and teachings of Jesus. In his response to the first temptation from Satan ("Turn these rocks into bread") he responds by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 – 'Man does not live by bread alone' - which is part of an exhortation to 'remember' the lessons of the manna in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1-4). When modelling prayer, Jesus addresses material needs by invoking a manna economy, asking "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). In the feedings of the 5000 and 4000, Jesus demonstrates the presence of unforeseen abundance when there is a communal concern that none have too little (see Mark 6:30-44 and Mark 8:1-10).

The apostle Paul also pointed to the story of the manna. When encouraging the more wealthy church in Corinth to send financial support to their poor brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, he refers them to the manna rules, summing them up by stating: 'The aim is equality' (2 Corinthians 8:14).

The great challenge of our time is to rediscover what living by a manna economy might actually look like. How much is 'enough' and how much is 'too much'? Our need to learn these lessons come into stark relief when we apply them to the use of the earth's natural resources: contrary to being scarce resources (the way in which we normally think of them), can we learn that they are actually abundant for our needs, if only some of us can learn not to gather 'too much'?

Further reading:*The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics*

by Ched Myers (2001)

Published by Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries.



The Israelites Gathering Manna, Ercole de Roberti, circa 1490s.



None shall have too little ...

Experiences of the food crisis in Cambodia

by Samantha Baker-Evens

A few people have asked me recently how Cambodians are dealing with the 'recession'. Recognizing their genuine concern and good hearts, I have searched for a diplomatic and non-melodramatic response, but in this case, the truth is just not reassuring. How are Cambodians responding to the recession? They are dying from it, the slow, silent death of old people and small children from malnutrition as rising food prices cause families to eat less with less variety. Crises like these are hard on all of us, but disproportionately affect the poor. Since Cambodia came out of war and oppression in 1991, the people have benefitted from development, and a new middle class has grown, but the past two years have brought high inflation. Families that were finally stabilising are now falling back into poverty.

Here's What's Happening

The wealthy (with whom I include myself and anyone with the ability to read this electronically) statistically spend roughly 10% of our income on food. The poor spend around 80% of their money on food, and the very poor, those living on a dollar a day or less, spend their entire income on food. In Cambodia, we have experienced roughly 20% inflation in the last year on average. The price of chicken went up 60 % but the price of magazines only went up 10%. For my poor neighbors who spend roughly 80% of their money on food and are not in the habit of buying magazines, 20% inflation is a low estimate. Food prices have gone up much more than anything else; rice, our staple, has doubled in price in the past year.

More Costly For Some than for Others

For my family, this inflation means that we don't go on as many outings on weekends. I have curbed my book addiction, and we don't buy cheese anymore. Our food budget has jumped from 20-30% of our income, but my son was still able to start preschool this year at the age of three. We are putting off replacing our rusty little car for another couple of years.

For Huon, the cook for the InnerCHANGE team office, a single woman in her forties, who works seven hours a day five days a week, making twice what a factory worker would make for six full days of work, the inflation means that she is riding her motorbike less, eating less and choosing cheaper food. She is not saving at the moment despite the need for surgery in the near future and the fact that she has no one to take care of her when she is old. She says: 'I know that I should save some money in case things get worse, but then I see my neighbors who are hungry and I have to share, or how could I be a Christian? I just have to trust God for the future.'

For Bora, a motorbike taxi driver who came to Phnom Penh to work while leaving his wife and child to farm their land, the rising cost of gasoline, food, and rent in the city has meant that he cannot send money home to his family. Additionally, two rice crops were ruined by a drought one year and a countrywide locust infestation the next. The family will have to borrow

How are Cambodians responding to the recession? They are dying from it, the slow, silent death of old people and small children from malnutrition as rising food prices cause families to eat less with less variety.

'I know that I should save some money in case things get worse, but then I see my neighbors who are hungry and I have to share, or how could I be a Christian? I just have to trust God for the future.'



money to buy seed next year. Bora's daughter is seven but won't start school again this year. He used to go back to his land every other weekend to see his family, a two-hour trip, but he can't afford to now. His wife is going to look for work in a factory in their province and leave their daughter at home with a grandmother. Bora says: 'The villages are empty of everyone except old people and young children. Everyone is going to the cities to find work.'

For Huon's neighbor, an HIV-positive widow who works in a cigarette factory and feeds six people - herself, her elderly mother, and her four young kids (aged between 2 and 8) - on \$1 a day, the rising cost of food means that the family is eating only rice with a little bit of dried fish on top once a day. This will probably result in her becoming ill again because the AIDS drugs she is taking don't work if the person taking them isn't well-nourished. Getting ill would put her job at risk. Realistically, it may also mean that at least one of her younger children will die before the age of five. Her kids are often sick and her mother has a persistent cough that won't go away. None of her kids are in school or can read.

What Can We Do About It?

My fear is that Christians in Australia and the US, rocked by natural disasters and shaken by the financial crisis, are only going to see suffering in the people close to them. I have already heard good, faithful people of God refer to 'taking care of our own first'. While this is an understandable reaction to this stressful and uncertain time, we still have far more options and resources than do poor Cambodians. Non-governmental organisations that serve these people are hurting for funds because giving from the 'rich West' is down. The World Food Programme has pulled out of Cambodia due to lack of funding.

In the upside-down Kingdom of God, the antidote to worrying about not having enough is to give more. In Biblical parlance this is called 'making purses for yourselves that will not wear out' (Luke 12). This is the time to give more, knowing that the poor will be more adversely affected and vulnerable than we are.

Samantha Baker-Evens works with InnerCHANGE and has been in Cambodia since 2004. InnerCHANGE is a Christian Order which lives amongst the poor.



Chris & Sam Baker-Evens with their two boys, Patrick and Isaac.



A scavenging garbage recycler in Phnom Penh, one of the many groups of people who live hand to mouth and are immediately affected by changes in food prices.

Non-governmental organisations that serve these people are hurting for funds because giving from the 'rich West' is down.

This is the time to give more ...



A street food-seller in Phnom Penh.



'... we ate all the food we wanted'

Understanding the global food crisis

by Jonathan Cornford

You have probably heard that the world has been in a 'food crisis' for a couple of years, but other than an annoying increase to our grocery bills, it can be hard for us in Australia to treat it seriously. However, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that since mid-2007 *an additional 75 million people* have gone hungry. The story by Samantha Baker-Evens (pp.4-5) puts a human face on this statistic.

World food prices – especially for the three key global crops: wheat, rice and corn - have been steadily rising since 2000. Between mid-2007 and mid-2008 there was a sharp spike in the prices of these crops – 130% for wheat, 98% for rice and 38% for corn. This had a dramatic impact on the ability of the poor to buy food, resulting in food riots across three continents. Since mid-2008, the export prices for these crops has dropped, although prices in developing countries still remain high.

So what has caused this crisis? The current food situation is a perfect storm of factors coming together all at once – some of these are what are called *cyclical factors*, which means they come and go; and some of these are *structural factors*, which means they will affect food prices for the long term. At the root of it all are some fundamental conundrums concerning our global food economy.

... some of us may actually have made a profit from the food crisis through our super funds.

Cyclical Factors

1. Drought in Australia resulted in a significant decline in the global wheat supply in 2006 and 2007. Flooding in South Asia and pests in Vietnam also impacted the 2007 rice crop.
2. Fleeing the sub-prime mortgage crisis, large financial investors, especially pension and superannuation funds, increasingly moved into speculation in food futures markets (where future crops are traded) to take advantage of rising prices, and further contributing to the price spike. (That's right, some of us may actually have made a profit from the food crisis through our super funds.)
3. Depreciation of the US dollar against Asian currencies resulted in higher wheat prices, as wheat is traded in US dollars.
4. In some countries, opportunistic hoarding of food stocks by traders pushed prices even higher.

Structural Factors

1. Rising oil prices have had a dramatic impact as agriculture around the world has become increasingly dependent on oil-based inputs, such as fertilizer, tractors and irrigation pumps.
2. Growing European demand for biofuels has led to a growing portion of corn to be diverted from food sale to biofuel use. In Asia, an increasing amount of land that was previously used for rice has been diverted to biofuel production.
3. As the growing Asian middle-class increasingly adopt



Western-style diets, the dramatic increase in meat and dairy consumption has led to increasing amounts of food grains (especially wheat and corn) being diverted from human consumption to livestock feed.

However, perhaps the most significant underlying factor in this food crisis is the one least talked about. Since the Industrial Revolution we have evolved a global economy that is *dependent on undervaluing food production*. The fantastic cheapness of our consumer goods is dependent on cheap wage labour in the urban centres of developing countries, who are in turn dependent on cheap food in order to survive. It is these who are hurting the most in the current crisis. The dark irony is that urban migration in developing countries is itself largely a result of the undervaluing of agriculture that keeps food cheap, as broken and dispirited farmers are left no option but to stream into the cities looking for work.

I am personally convinced that a fairer and more ecologically sustainable economy is dependent on bringing the role of agriculture back to the centre of things, and this ultimately means paying more for food. But how can we get there without increasing the suffering of the world's urban poor? Solving this Gordian Knot is one of the great challenges of our time, as if we didn't have enough to sort out already ...

... the dramatic increase in meat and dairy consumption has led to increasing amounts of food grains (especially wheat and corn) being diverted from human consumption to livestock feed.

The Food Crisis and You

How can we take responsibility for our part in the global food system?

1. Eat less meat – much of the livestock that produces our meat are fed grain at some stage of their life cycle (some intensively). This diverts grain from human consumption, increasing demand and raising the price.
2. Take some action to support international labour rights – in the longer term, the best outcome for workers in poor countries is higher wages rather than cheaper food. See www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/labour-rights
3. Switch your superannuation to an ethical investment fund that uses a positive screen investment approach – see www.responsibleinvestment.org for a comparison of super funds. This should mean that they do not speculate in commodities futures markets, however it wouldn't hurt to ask them just to check.
4. Voluntarily begin to pay a higher price for food by buying organic food (fruit and veges, milk, meat) and fair trade produce (tea, coffee, chocolate, cocoa). This will not alleviate the food crisis in poorer countries, but it does promote fairer and more careful agriculture and it is a start down the long road to restoring a higher economic standing for agriculture.
5. Where you can, try to buy food grown closer to home. Once again, this will not alleviate the current food crisis, but if more countries have a *greater degree* of food production that services local needs, this will improve food security in the longer-term. Reducing 'food miles' is also important for climate change reasons (see article on next page).



‘What is it?’

A reflection on the 100-mile diet

by Kim Cornford

The quiet at the end of the day comes at last and I am settling into the evening peace of sleeping children and a warm cuppa. We’ve been thinking about ‘food miles’ and as I read the label on the block of chocolate in front of me, my mind journeys around the globe, crossing four continents. The cocoa beans in my chocolate have been grown in both Ghana and Costa Rica, then processed in Belgium, and ended up with me in my comfy lounge in Melbourne. That’s quite a journey.

This idea of food miles essentially asks how far our food has traveled to get from paddock to plate. Tim Lang, the English Professor who first coined the term, says: ‘The point was to highlight the hidden ecological, social and economic consequences of food production to consumers in a simple way...’. It forces us to recognise that transporting food vast distances (the norm in our global food system) has impacts in terms of oil production and carbon emissions, and is a significant contributing factor in climate change. As we discussed in the last edition of *Manna Matters*, it is the poor who suffer most from a changing climate.

Late last year we joined a small group of people having a go at the 100-mile diet for a week. This meant figuring out how to source our food from within a 160km radius of Melbourne.

Our preparations began with a simple pantry audit. After filling two pages of my A4 notebook with items and noting where they came from, I discovered that there were only four items labelled ‘Product of Australia’ and the rest were labelled ‘Made from local or imported ingredients’. Gulp. This was not leaving many pantry items for our 100 mile diet week. Then I realised that two out of the four ‘Product of Australia’ items included golden syrup and sugar, neither of which come from Victoria, let alone within 160 kilometres.

In one of the early planning meetings of the group we were asked to share what things we would miss. I was (quietly) bemused that most folk only mentioned one or two items. When it came around to me, all sorts of things came tumbling out... sugar, tea, coffee, rice, soy sauce, fish sauce, curry pastes, spices, and so the list went on. (I must confess, in the end I just couldn’t give up coffee and salt.)

However, as the hunting and researching continued, together the group sourced heaps of good food, and I was increasingly impressed at how the week’s menu was shaping up. For breakfast we had strawberries and yoghurt, followed by homemade toasted sourdough with honey. Lunch most days was homemade sourdough with smoked trout, and an assortment of tomato, lettuce, rocket, cucumber, mushrooms, fresh peas, gouda cheese, butter, eggs from home, and honey. Evening meals? Spelt pasta with tomato sauce including onion, garlic, olives, and mushrooms... Roast chicken stuffed with rosemary, chives, sage and lemon; silverbeet sautéed with garlic and butter, roast carrots & potatoes, and broccoli... Pork Pie...

After filling two pages of my A4 notebook with items and noting where they came from, I discovered that there were only four items labelled ‘Product of Australia’ and the rest were labelled ‘Made from local or imported ingredients’. Gulp.



Emma Keldan making pasta for her 100-mile diet, ably assisted by Rose. Finding wheat flour grown within 100 miles of Melbourne was a big challenge.

homemade gnocchi ... wild rabbit stew... We ate pretty well!

Undertaking the 100-mile diet for one week was a great way of forcing us to learn more about where our food comes from. Now we diligently read food labels, and have substituted a number of our imported pantry items for Australian grown products. We don't buy some products at all now or only when they are in season. Other items have become luxuries for special occasions.

But to be honest, doing the diet for just one week was pretty hard, and we certainly have no intention of trying to live by it. It also demonstrated that living by any arbitrary rule quickly presents many anomalies – for example, it sometimes meant choosing conventionally

grown vegies (and therefore with high oil-based inputs) over much healthier and more sustainable organic produce. Nevertheless, I would recommend it to anyone as one of those challenging, eye-opening experiences that is good to do from time to time.

One of the most important things we learned was that there is rarely a perfect purchase. Ethical shopping and eating involves making trade-offs and personal value judgments.

And what did I miss most over the week? When Sunday came around, I have to say I have never quite looked forward to a bowl of muesli as much as I did that morning.

The average Australian basket of food has traveled over 70,000km from producer to consumer.

(Source: research presented at the Agri-Food XIV conference in Brisbane in November 2007.)

News in detail:

(cont. from p.1)

- The first activity of the **Save the Mekong Campaign** – the postcards and petitions – is drawing to a close, with the petitions to be delivered in person to the Thai Prime Minister on June 18. See www.savethemekong.org for more info. At the Australian end of the campaign, we are working on plans for a major Mekong photo exhibition in October, specifically aimed at encouraging the Australian Government to be more proactively engaged with Mekong Governments through the aid program.
- **Manna Gum Bible Studies** have been enthusiastically attended, and are now stretching our little lounge room to capacity: in March/April we ran *Living with the Word: a six week series on reading the Bible* with the Footscray Church of Christ; and over May/June have been running *The Law of Life: A five week exploration of the treasures of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)*
- In May the **Manna Gum Management Committee** met for our annual retreat where we engaged in some very useful reflection, which included some fruitful planning for developing the **Household Covenant** ... stay tuned.
- Jonathan has been doing a few bits of **writing on faith and economy** for other publications, including the TEAR journals *Target* and *Harambee*, the Evangelical Alliance and *Journey*, the magazine for the Uniting Church in Queensland.
- In the first two weeks of June Manna Gum co-hosted evening talks on **Cambodia: Development, Conflict & Transformation** with the Uniting Church Justice & International Mission Unit and TEAR Australia. The speakers were Chris and Sam Baker-Evens from InnerCHANGE and Jonathan Cornford, discussing land conflict and hydropower development.
- We are just about to embark on **two months of travel:**
 - the Cornford family is heading north, first to **Brisbane** where we will talk at a couple of Uniting Churches, the Waiter's Union in West End, and also to TEAR groups, and then to **Townsville** for six weeks. This has the combined purpose of visiting family and getting away to focus on some writing (we are lucky to have use of both a house and a separate office space for this time).
 - in the middle of that, Jonathan will travel to **Cambodia** for a couple of weeks to undertake some livelihoods documentation work for the Save the Mekong Campaign. He will be accompanied by Glenn Daniels, who has volunteered his time and skills as a professional photographer to collect high quality images, which are always invaluable in any advocacy campaign.
- We have just secured funding from Oxfam Australia for a **research project on the Australian aid program** – the project, entitled *How much and how good?*, is an examination of the delivery of aid through international financial institutions such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.



MANNA GUM

— Enough for all —

Financial Appeal

Manna Gum seeks to live within the economy of God – frugally, ethically and through the generous sharing of abundance within the community of faith (2 Corinthians 8 & 9).

Are we crazy?! Quite possibly, yes. But we are also sustained by the conviction that the great secret of God's economy is the presence of abundance where the world only sees scarcity.

Our short-term goal is to raise \$1250 per month, which will cover half of our annual financial needs. Currently we are receiving \$750 per month – another 17 supporters at \$30 per month would get us there. If you can't become a monthly supporter, consider a donation.



**SHORT-TERM GOAL: \$1250 per month
(40 supporters @ \$30 per month)**

Support the work of MANNA GUM



About Manna Gum

Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation that seeks to:

1. Provide resources for Christian groups to understand and practise the social, economic and political implications of the Gospel of Christ; and

2. Stimulate critical thinking on issues of aid and development, poverty and wealth, and to undertake research and advocacy on matters concerning Australian aid and development involvement overseas.

Please contact us if you would like more information about our work or to find how we could support you and your group/organisation to explore some of these issues.

MANNA GUM seeks to live within the economy of God – frugally, ethically and through the generous sharing of abundance within the community of faith. If our work resonates with you, please consider becoming a financial supporter.

- I would like to make a donation to MANNA GUM.
 I would like to become a regular financial supporter of MANNA GUM

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