Book Review: *Transplanting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and Food for Peace* By Kristin L. Ahlberg

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In 1954 the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act, commonly known as Public Law 480, established a new food aid program designed to eliminate agricultural surpluses and improve farm prices. Although Congress also intended it to expand foreign trade, encourage foreign economic development, and enhance the foreign policy of the United States, Lyndon Johnson used Public Law 480 as a political tool to extend the principles of the Great Society internationally and, most importantly, fight Communist expansion. Rechristened as the Food for Peace program in 1959, Lyndon Johnson later transformed it from a domestic agricultural policy to a foreign policy tool that he used to reward friendly nations who supported American objectives abroad.

Although the Johnson administration used the Food for Peace program to fight hunger and foster American-style democracy and capitalism abroad and to ensure needed international support, during the 1960s the program became hotly contested, with the departments of state and agriculture both wanting programmatic control for different reasons. Johnson, however, always made the final decisions regarding the program’s application, often on a country-by-country basis. India, Israel, and South Vietnam benefited from this humanitarian food assistance program, but Johnson also used it to force agricultural reform in India, subsidize military defense purchases in Israel, and contribute to the pacification program in South Vietnam. In all cases Johnson used the Food for Peace program for humanitarian and cold war foreign policy purposes.

Kristin Ahlberg provides an excellent history of the Food for Peace program by tracing its evolution from the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations, during which time it changed from a domestic economic policy designed to liquidate surplus agricultural commodities to a diplomatic tool that required farmers to produce targeted commodities for foreign policy purposes. Essentially, food aid became a political issue, with the Johnson administration using it not only to feed hungry people whom it considered susceptible to communist ideology, but also to gain support for American foreign policy. Many governments accepted American food assistance while rejecting the attached political strings, particularly refraining from supporting the Vietnam War. By the end of the Johnson administration, the Food for Peace program had achieved mixed results. It had been used successfully to fight hunger and to help increase military preparedness for selected friendly nations, but it had not enabled Lyndon Johnson to spread the goals and benefits of the Great Society abroad. When Johnson left office, the Food for Peace program served as a diplomatic tool to assist friendly nations, but it also drove domestic farm policy. In both areas it created new problems without solving old ones.

This extensively researched, clearly written, and well-argued book merits the attention of all historians of American agriculture and foreign policy. It is an important read. **R. Douglas Hurt, Department of History, Purdue University.**