

Academic Introduction & Thesis Statement

The following three paragraphs offer a sample academic thesis statement. You can consider this a “template” for how to develop an introduction, which includes (1) a topic, (2) a thesis statement, and (3) main supporting points. Paul Collier is Professor of Economics and Director of the Center for the Study of African Economies at Oxford University. He is an economist who focuses on African countries in the globalized economy. His most recent book is *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*. Collier wrote the following article, “The Politics of Hunger,” for the academic and political journal *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/Dec 2008). This article is short for an academic article. It is about 13 pages. To introduce this short article, Collier uses three paragraphs: two paragraphs introduce his topic and his main concerns about his topic; the third paragraph introduces his thesis and main supporting points, which will be developed, explained, and proved in the body of the article.

“The Politics of Hunger: How Illusion and Greed Fan the Food Crisis” By Paul Collier

After many years of stability, world food prices have jumped 83 percent since 2005 – prompting warning of a food crisis throughout much of the world earlier this year. In the United States and Europe, the increase in food prices is already yesterday’s news; consumers in the developed world now have more pressing concerns, such as the rising price of energy and the falling price of houses. But in the developing world, a food shock of this magnitude is a major political event. To the typical household in poor countries, food is the equivalent of energy in the United States, and people expect their government to do something when prices rise. Already, there have been food riots in some 30 countries; in Haiti, they brought down the prime minister. And for some consumers in the world’s poorest countries, the true anguish of high food prices is only just the beginning. If global food prices remain high, the consequences will be grim both ethically and politically.

Politicians and policymakers do, in fact, have it in their power to bring food prices down. But so far, their responses have been less than encouraging: beggar-thy-neighbor restrictions, pressure for yet larger farm subsidies, and a retreat into romanticism. In the first case, neighbors have been beggared by the imposition of export restrictions by the governments of food-exporting countries. This has had the immaculately dysfunctional consequence of further elevating world prices while reducing the incentives for the key producers to invest in the agricultural sector. In the second case, the subsidy hunters have, unsurprisingly, turned the crisis into an opportunity; for example, Michel Barnier, the French agricultural minister, took it as a chance to urge the European Commission to reverse its incipient subsidy-slashing reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy. And finally, the romantics have portrayed the food crisis as demonstrating the failure of scientific commercial agriculture, which they have long found distasteful. In its place they advocate the return to organic small-scale farming – counting on abandoned technologies to feed a prospective world population of nine billion.

The real challenge is not the technical difficulty of returning the world to cheap food, but the political difficulty of confronting the lobbying interests and illusions of which current policies rest. Feeding the world will involve three politically challenging steps. First, contrary to the romantics, the world needs more commercial agriculture, not less. The Brazilian model of high-productivity large farms could readily be extended to areas where land is underused. Second, and again contrary to the romantics, the world needs more science: the European ban and the consequential African ban on genetically modified (GM) crops are slowing the pace of agricultural productivity growth in the face of accelerating growth in demand. Ending such restrictions could be part of a deal, a mutual de-escalation of follow, that would achieve the third step: in return for Europe’s lifting its self-damaging ban on GM products, the United States should lift its self-damaging subsidies supporting domestic biofuel.