

# Creating FEED

An Interview with Lauren Bush,  
Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, FEED Projects



Lauren Bush modeling a FEED bag

**EDITORS' NOTE** Lauren Bush is also the Creative Director of FEED Projects LLC and serves as the Chairman of the Board for the FEED Foundation. In 2004, Bush became an Honorary Spokesperson for the UN World Food Programme (WFP), and helped start the Universities Fighting Hunger Campaign in the U.S. Bush has been a fashion model, appearing on the cover of publications like *W*, *Glamour*, and *Tatler*. She studied photography and fashion design at Parsons in New York and Central Saint Martins College of Arts & Design in London. Bush graduated from Princeton University in 2006 with a B.A. in Anthropology and a Certificate in Photography.

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** The mission of FEED Projects ([www.feedprojects.com](http://www.feedprojects.com)) is to create products that help feed the world through the sale of FEED bags, bears, T-shirts, and other accessories by building a set donation into the cost of each product. The impact of each product is signified by a stenciled number. FEED Projects was started in 2006 when model and activist Lauren Bush designed a bag to benefit the United Nations World Food Programme's (WFP) School Feeding operations. She created the FEED 1 bag, a reversible burlap and cotton bag stamped with "FEED the children of the world" and the number "1" to signify that each bag feeds one child in school for one year. In 2007, Bush and then-WFP Communications Officer Ellen Gustafson founded FEED Projects, LLC and started selling FEED 1 bags in April of 2007. By the end of 2007, they raised donations for WFP to feed over 37,500 hungry school children for one year. FEED bags are made with sustainable materials and are designed to be used as an alternative to disposable paper and plastic bags.

## How was FEED created to address the problem of hunger?

FEED came as a simple idea I had after traveling around the world with the UN World Food Programme as a student spokesperson. Through that experience, I not only saw the great work they were doing but learned about the realities of hunger and poverty that many people live with around the world.

What struck me is that while every region is different, hunger is a persistent problem and is so large that many people don't know how to begin to engage it.

The challenge I had as a student spokesperson was seeing these issues and coming home to talk to young people in different schools about not only what I saw but what could be done about it. It so frustrated and overwhelmed me that I didn't know what I could do beyond spreading awareness.

One of the more brilliant developmental programs, School Feeding, gives kids a lunch meal in school, which is often the only meal they may get a day. That meal acts as an incentive for the kids to go to school and for their parents to send them there. Additionally, if they're given this nutritious meal in the middle of the school day, they learn better and are likely to stay in school longer than they might otherwise have.

It costs so little. The world average now is about \$50 to feed a kid in school for a year – that is 200 warm, nutritious lunch meals.

I was moved by this program and shocked by how little it takes to make a difference. So I thought it would be easy to build that cost into the cost of a bag and sell it to help this program, and also to help empower young people here who want to give back in a tangible way but don't know how because world hunger is an overwhelming problem unless you break it down into a measurable donation that is easy to understand and that makes a difference.

## How does the program work?

We have several different versions now of what was the original FEED bag. The proceeds of many of them we give to the UN World Food Programme School Feeding program; we also give a lot to the UNICEF Micronutrient program and they take the funds and designate them to where the money is needed most, which is ever-changing.

For example, Guatemala was the first country I visited with the World Food Programme and now eight or nine years later, the government is running that program so they no longer need outside assistance. That is the goal – for each country to take ownership of these programs and make them happen on the ground.

We also do country-specific bags. For example, we make a bag in Guatemala that goes to benefit UNICEF's Micronutrient program in Guatemala, and similarly, we make a bag in Kenya, each of which feeds two kids in Kenya.

So with the artisan-made products, we try to set it up so that the proceeds always go back to benefit the country they're being made in.

## Is there an understanding of the hunger issues within America and is that being addressed effectively?

It's such a different set of issues. That was one of our barriers to get involved here and why for the most part, we have only supported charities abroad.

But we launched FEED USA last year with GAP as our launch partner. Since our main focus and giving has been school meals abroad, we thought it best to focus on giving healthier school meals to kids in America.

We partnered with DonorsChoose.org to set up a platform where teachers, school by school, request things like salad bars, cooking class kits, school gardens, giant-sized blenders, and industrial refrigerators – so either equipment to get healthier school meals to the cafeterias or nutrition education tools.

You need a salad bar in the school so you can serve raw, green leafy vegetables, but you also have to educate kids and make it fun for them to find out where their vegetables are coming from and teach them to grow their own, and they will grow up to be healthier adults by virtue of that.

## Was the need to give back instilled in you early on?

My mom had us volunteer and serve food at soup kitchens growing up, and she herself had a nonprofit. My whole family was into service.

But the a-ha moment came about when I went on these trips with the World Food Programme and saw the level of hunger firsthand. Once you see it, it's something you have to respond to and make it part of your life.

And I feel blessed that I was able to combine it with something I also love, which is product development and running a business. ●