



**Friends of  
the Earth  
International**

# trade and people's food sovereignty

april 2003





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position paper

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## index

**executive summary** | 2

**people's food sovereignty** part one | 5

the wto and access to food | 5

rising food import costs | 6

export-led development, debt and value-added processing | 7

corporate control | 9

**improving agricultural production** part two | 10

promoting diverse sustainable agricultural practices | 10

strengthening local food economies | 11

ensuring access to resources | 12

conserving biodiversity | 13

improving food safety and quality | 14



# executive summary



Riverford organic farm, Devon, UK.

Food and water are peoples' most basic needs. Agriculture is therefore critical for all people.

The 1996 Rome Declaration on World Food Security reaffirmed *"the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger"*<sup>1</sup>. Friends of the Earth International believes that promoting food sovereignty is the most effective way to secure the rights of all peoples to adequate, safe food and freedom from hunger, as well as promoting sustainable agriculture and food systems.

Food sovereignty is the right of communities, peoples and countries to determine their own agricultural and food policies, including the protection and regulation of domestic agricultural production and trade in order to meet food security and sustainability objectives. Food sovereignty includes food security, food safety, diverse sustainable agricultural practices, and subsistence and small-scale farming. Diverse sustainable agriculture and food production is a key feature of food sovereignty since it can better provide sufficient quantities of affordable, safe and

healthy food for all and is the foundation of healthy rural and urban communities, cultures and environments.

However, policies being promoted by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have encouraged the development of an entirely unsustainable system of agriculture and food production. The globalisation of agriculture and food systems has been marked by a move to industrial, export-oriented production heavily influenced by the interests of transnational corporations (TNCs), who are increasingly able to dictate the way that food is produced, traded and marketed.

This system of agriculture is proving unable to deliver global food security and environmental sustainability. Shockingly, 826 million people, the majority of them women and children, are still suffering from hunger and other forms of malnutrition, even though there is sufficient food being produced at a global level to provide everyone with enough food. The inequitable distribution of resources, land and food is one of the main causes of hunger and malnutrition in the world today and the current trade liberalisation process, as promoted by the WTO - particularly through the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) - is part of the cause of this, not the solution.

This is because the WTO promotes a mixture of liberalisation and regulation that prevents global food sovereignty. It is systematically undermining subsistence farming and the livelihoods of small farmers around the world. It has led to the establishment of intellectual

property rights systems that permit TNCs to expropriate farmers' knowledge of food production techniques and basic resources such as seeds. It discourages sustainable agriculture and the production of safe and healthy food.

These trends, evident in both the North and the South, cannot continue. We need to change track: agriculture needs to focus on and promote food security, food sovereignty and diverse sustainable agricultural practices, not 'efficient' production. There should be a fundamental and inalienable right for communities, people and countries to decide their own policies to secure an adequate and affordable supply of safe, healthy and nutritious food for every individual. Unsustainable, export-oriented and chemical dependent production needs to be replaced with more sustainable and humane farming and agricultural practices. Safe, healthy and nutritious food for all needs to be the end goal.

In short, what is required is a move towards systems of food production and trade that reflect social, environmental and economic sustainability. In social terms, sustainable food systems should ensure equity in access for men, women and children to land, seeds and safe, healthy food, while also nurturing community and enhancing social equity and democracy. In environmental terms, they should encompass ecologically sustainable land-use and marketing systems, and use local seasonal food to provide first and foremost for local needs. In economic terms, they should ensure fair and equitable returns to producers and their communities.

1 | FAO (1996) Rome Declaration on World Food Security. World Food Summit, 17th-19th November, Rome, Italy. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>.

## executive summary

The solutions to the current crisis - both in the short and long term - require a deep and radical shift away from exported-oriented, industrial agriculture. Ultimately, WTO rules should not apply to food and agriculture. Given the urgency of the situation, however, there are a number of steps that could be taken immediately. Governments need to:

- **Prevent the destruction of subsistence and small-holder farming by immediately eliminating all forms of direct and indirect export support and dumping by:**
  - **reforming support systems by removing supports which directly or indirectly promote exports and production for export, and phasing-in measures to eliminate structural surpluses;**
  - **re-instituting the sovereign right to implement import controls, including tariffs, in food and agriculture, to support sustainable food production for local consumption; and**
  - **ensuring that there are no restrictions on support for sustainable agriculture for domestic consumption.**
- **Establish regulations to curb the power of corporations,** including by introducing effective international legislation to prevent the formation and consolidation of monopolies, oligopolies and cartels in food and agricultural systems; regulating retailers to ensure they buy and sell food at a fair price without making excessive profits at the expense of either producers or consumers;

introducing high minimum standards for corporate activities; and placing legal requirements concerning community consultation and redress and personal legal liability, on companies and their directors respectively.

- **Transform agricultural and food sector finance** by increasing levels of, and reorienting aid towards, capacity building; increasing local participatory influence and control over local food systems; establishing micro-projects and micro-enterprises and sustainable ecological/organic and humane farming; addressing poverty issues to ensure that policies leading to higher food prices do not disadvantage the poorest sections of society, particularly women and children; ensuring that the increased internalised costs of production are met by the polluter and, where appropriate, passed on to processors and retailers; and using revenues from polluter pays taxes to finance the development of sustainable agricultural practices.
- **Protect traditional knowledge and rights to resources** by affirming farmers', Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' rights over plant genetic resources and associated knowledge, including farmers' rights to exchange and reproduce seeds; ensuring equitable access to land (including through land reform), seeds, water, credit and other productive resources for male and female farmers; and recognizing and enforcing communities' legal and customary rights to make decisions concerning their local, traditional resources, even where no legal rights have previously been allocated. In view of this, the



Forest products from El Cornelio Cloud Forest, Costa Rica.

WTO's agreement on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights should either be re-written or abandoned and the patenting of life forms should be prohibited

- **Promote the adoption of diverse sustainable agricultural practices** that reduce and reverse the loss of biodiversity, including by phasing out domestic subsidies that promote unsustainable land use and inequitable land tenure patterns; encouraging socially, environmentally and economically sustainable farming techniques through the use of targeted domestic production subsidies, controls and other incentives; recognising countries' rights to ban or otherwise restrict the production of and trade in genetically modified seed, food, animal feeds and related products; and banning all forms of patents on life.

## executive summary

- **Accord the very highest priority to the comprehensive and unconditional cancellation of debt** for all developing countries in recognition of the ecological debt that industrialised countries owe the South, which now far outweighs the official financial debt owed by developing countries. This will enable countries to step off the export-oriented agricultural tread-mill and support sustainable agricultural practices.
- **Ensure high food standards**, including through the introduction of clear and accurate labeling of food and agricultural products; the establishment of effective mechanisms to assist local food producers to meet high (and often expensive) environmental, social and health standards; and the reform of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.



*Riverford organic farm, Devon, UK.*

In short, Friends of the Earth believes that the development of food sovereignty, food security and sustainable agriculture will require governments to acknowledge the flaws in the free market principles that underpin perceived comparative advantage, export-led agricultural development and structural adjustment policies; and to replace those policies with ones that prioritise local, subsistence and sustainability requirements in all countries, using both import controls and regulation to discriminate in favour of more equitable sustainable production methods. International trade will still require a set of effective and enforceable multilateral rules, but ultimately the World Trade Organisation, with its current focus on trade liberalization at all costs, is not an appropriate place for such rules. It is the UN that should take the lead in drafting such rules, for example in the form of a UN Convention on food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture.



FoE Benin working with local people to create a garden for biodiversity preservation and education.

## the wto and access to food

The 1996 Rome Declaration on World Food Security reaffirmed *“the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger”*<sup>2</sup>. And yet progress to meet this fundamental right is grindingly slow. The FAO estimates that 826 million people are still suffering from hunger and other forms of malnutrition.<sup>3</sup>

Friends of the Earth International believes that promoting food sovereignty is the most effective way to secure the rights of all peoples to adequate, safe food and freedom from hunger.

Food sovereignty is the right of communities, peoples and countries to determine their own agricultural and food policies, including the protection and regulation of domestic agricultural production and trade in order to meet food security and sustainability objectives. Food sovereignty includes food security, food safety, diverse sustainable agricultural practices, and subsistence and small-scale farming.

Free trade rules and agreements do not promote food sovereignty and can even promote the opposite: an increasing focus on industrial, export-oriented agriculture tends to cause decreased food security, unsustainable agriculture and loss of people from the land. As a result, countries must have the right to and should take domestic measures to promote and protect peoples' food sovereignty.

Local, national and regional agricultural economies increasingly need to be able to determine the extent to which they can produce their own food on a sustainable basis. At the same time, they will be able to generate wealth, employment, more vibrant rural communities and a more balanced and diverse environment. The goal should be a move towards sustainable and localised agro-food systems.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, it is recognized that countries will still need to trade and should retain the option to do so. Some countries need to trade to enhance their food security. For example, countries may choose to trade in order to secure sufficient quantities of food to meet domestic demands, particularly after poor harvests or following crop failures, or to earn foreign exchange. Countries will also import products that they cannot produce themselves. In view of all these factors, there is still a need for international trade in food and agricultural products which needs to be regulated effectively at the multilateral level. Nevertheless, this trade should still have as its end goals the achievement of food sovereignty, food security and sustainability.

In short, agricultural trade - at any level, local, regional or international - must meet sustainability objectives:

- **Domestic policies that prioritise diverse sustainable agricultural practices and the production of affordable, safe and good quality food must be given priority.**
- **Farmers should also receive fair returns for their labour and produce.**
- **When international trade is essential, priority should be given to sustainably produced food.**
- **In order to reduce the distances that food is transported and so minimize associated pollution, trade should take place according to the ‘proximity principle’ so that the most local source of a product should be used to supply people’s needs.**

There is also an urgent need to consider the implications of war for food sovereignty and food security. The protection of, and equitable access to, productive resources is especially important in regions where there are wars since the redistribution and strategic control of resources is often both an effect and a cause of the conflict.

This briefing considers some of the potential conflicts between these priorities and trade liberalization and suggests policy changes to counter these trends. The second part of the paper also examines issues relating to industrialised corporate-controlled agriculture and again outlines policy changes that could deliver sustainable food and agriculture.

2 | FAO (1996) Op cit.

3 | FAO (2000) The State of Food Security in the World Shows No Progress towards World Food Summit Target. Press Release, 16th October. Food and Agriculture Organisation, Rome. [www.fao.org/WAICENT/OIS/PRESSNG/2000/pren0056.htm](http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/OIS/PRESSNG/2000/pren0056.htm)

4 | A localised agro-food system is one where the production, processing, trading, marketing and consumption of food and other agricultural products takes place as far as possible within (or as close as possible to) the same locality. Where this is not possible, trade should be conducted nationally or within regional trading blocks.

The level of hunger and malnutrition currently experienced in the world is not caused by lack of food. There is sufficient food being produced at a global level to provide everyone with enough food. Rather, it is the inequitable distribution of food, land and other resources that are the main causes of hunger and malnutrition in the world today. Trade liberalisation in food, as promoted by the WTO - particularly through the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) – exacerbates this situation by undermining food sovereignty and food security in countries around the world.



FoE Benin's medicinal plant garden for biodiversity preservation and education.

## rising food import costs

For example, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) found that out of 14 country case studies examining experiences with the implementation of the AoA, the cost of food imports in 1995-98 exceeded 1990-94 levels in all cases. Increases ranged from 30 percent in Senegal to 168 percent in India and outweighed any gains from increased exports. For two countries - India and Brazil - the food import bill more than doubled. In a further five it increased by 50-100 percent.<sup>5</sup> This has serious implications for global food sovereignty and food security.

The process of liberalisation is also undermining the livelihoods of small farmers, particularly through cheap food imports and the 'dumping'<sup>6</sup> of produce on world agricultural markets. For instance, Consumers International reported on an FAO case study of Sri Lanka that found the AoA has caused a surge of food imports since 1996 and a decline in the domestic production of a number of food crops. These problems resulted in a huge decrease in rural employment. The reduction in production of onions and potatoes alone was reported to have caused the loss of 300,000 rural jobs.<sup>7</sup> It has been suggested it would not be unreasonable to estimate that 30 million jobs have been lost as a result of trade liberalisation and associated factors.<sup>8</sup>

Peoples' food sovereignty and food security are being undermined by global over-production, increased trade and the dumping of surplus agricultural produce.

Throughout the world this is undermining local domestic food production by small farmers, who typically produce for local consumption. To counter this, communities, peoples and countries should have the right to:

- **Impose controls and restrictions on imports (ie. restrictions on cheap imports and 'dumped' produce that undermine local production) and on trade in genetically modified agricultural production; and**
- **Develop and support localised food economies based on local production, processing, marketing and consumption.**

Communities, peoples and countries should also be obliged to:

- **Prevent the destruction of subsistence and small-holder farming by immediately eliminating all forms of direct and indirect export support and dumping by:**
  - **reforming support systems by removing supports which directly or indirectly promote exports and production for export, and phasing-in measures to eliminate structural surpluses;**
  - **re-instituting the sovereign right to implement import controls, including tariffs, in food and agriculture, to support sustainable food production for local consumption; and**
  - **ensuring that there are no restrictions on support for sustainable agriculture for domestic consumption.**

5 | FAO (2000). Agriculture, Trade and Food: Country Case Studies, Volume II: Synthesis of the Country Case Studies. Available at: [www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/X8731e/x8731e01a.htm](http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/X8731e/x8731e01a.htm)

6 | Dumping involves "the sale of agricultural products at less than cost of production prices in the local markets of developing countries". Murphy, S. (2002) Managing the Invisible Hand: Markets, Farmers and International Trade. Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, p.9.

7 | Consumers International (2000) The Agreement on Agriculture, Post-Seattle. Trade and Economics Briefing Paper, November 2000, No.2, Consumers International, London.

8 | Madeley, J. (2000) Trade and Hunger: An Overview of Case Studies on the Impact of Trade Liberalisation on Food Security. A Report from the Church of Sweden Aid, Diakonia, Forum Syd, The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and the Programme of Global Studies.

Targets and timetables should take into account the differing needs of developing countries and vulnerable communities. For example, indebted developing countries that rely upon agricultural exports to earn foreign currency are unlikely to be able to restructure their agricultural sectors until their debts are cancelled.



*Foe Australia's organic inner city food coop in Melbourne.*

## **export-led development, debt and value-added processing**

In fact, the debt situation is now such that a significant proportion of developing countries' export earnings must be used to repay debt. In 1996, for example, 42 percent of the export earnings of both Ethiopia and Bolivia were used to service their debts. In Peru it was 35 percent and Ghana 26 percent.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the costs to developing countries of servicing those debts in 1997 were five times higher than the amount they received in development aid.<sup>10</sup>

Loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, and structural adjustment programmes have generally been granted on the condition that trade is liberalised and export-led growth promoted. Where a country is perceived to have a comparative advantage in growing certain crops, that

country has been encouraged, by these institutions, to specialise in growing and exporting those crops in order to earn export currency and so repay their debts. In short, the IMF and World Bank, through their structural adjustment policies and loan conditionalities, are promoting unsustainable large-scale agricultural production geared solely for export rather than small-scale farming to feed local people.

Such export-led development often requires land that had previously been used by many families dependent upon subsistence agriculture. In Cambodia, for example, it is estimated that 10-15 percent of the country's farmers have been made landless since the adoption of the liberal market economy in 1989, while the remaining land is being concentrated into fewer hands<sup>11</sup>.

In the Philippines, for example, following failed agrarian reform programmes, land is now being re-concentrated into the hands of landlords and corporations resulting in 700,000 jobs in agriculture being lost since 1996<sup>12</sup>.

In Andhra Pradesh, India, the Vision 2020 plan for transforming agriculture from subsistence production to farm consolidation, modernization and mechanization is expected to result in the loss of 20 million small farmers from the land (a reduction from 70% to 40% of the population working on the land). The Vision 2020 is being supported by a grant of £65 million from British aid money<sup>13</sup>.

In China, where 92 percent of the population worked on the land in 1979, the abandonment of collectivised agriculture and the efforts to integrate rapidly into the global economy have seen this figure reduced to just 42 percent. In one year alone, 10 million Chinese peasants left their land.<sup>14</sup> In fact, it has long been argued that relying largely on export agriculture to earn foreign currency will force countries to take out more loans as the prices of agricultural products continue to spiral downward.<sup>15</sup>

9 | Jubilee (2001) Data Bank. Available at: [www.jubileeplus.org/databank/data.htm](http://www.jubileeplus.org/databank/data.htm).

10 | Madeley, J. (1999) *Big Business, Poor Peoples: The Impact of Transnational Corporations on the World's Poor*. Zed Books, London.

11 | Case Study reported in Madeley, J. (2000) *Trade and Hunger: An Overview of Case Studies on the Impact of Trade Liberalisation on Food Security*. A Report from the Church of Sweden Aid, Diakonia, Forum Syd, The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and the Programme of Global Studies.

7 | foei - trade and people's food sovereignty

12 | Report by Danilo H. Ramos, quoted in: PAN AP (2002) *Empty Promises... Empty Stomachs: Impact of the Agreement on Agriculture and Trade Liberalisation on Food Security*. PAN AP, Malaysia.

13 | Hines, C. and Shiva, V. (2002) *A Better Agriculture is Possible: Local Food, Global Solution*. A Report for the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation World Food Summit, Rome, Italy, June 2002. A Discussion Paper prepared by the International Forum on Globalisation and the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology.

14 | Johnson, I. (1994) *Tens of Millions of peasants are setting off on China's new long march to find hope and work in the city*. *The Guardian*, Nov.3rd, p.3. Cited in Norberg-Hodge, H., Merrifield, T. and Gorelick, S. (2000) *Bringing the Food Economy Home: The Social, Ecological and Economic Benefits of Local Food*. ISEC, Dartington, Devon

15 | Altvater, E., H\_bner, K., Lorentzen, J. and Rojas, R. (1987) *The Poverty of Nations: A Guide to the Debt Crisis From Argentina to Zaire*. Zed Books, London.



Overall, export-led development tends to lead to an increasing concentration of land and power in the hands of the few, benefiting investors, agricultural companies and wealthy farmers, while large parts of the rural population suffer displacement from small farms, loss of livelihoods and forced migration to cities.

Furthermore, export-led development has led to world markets being oversupplied and commodity prices tumbling as a result, reducing returns to producers. The example of coffee growing in Vietnam illustrates this point. In the early 1990s, the World Bank provided a loan for restructuring the agricultural sector and many farmers took up loans to produce coffee for export. Four years later the first crops were harvested and Vietnam became the second largest producer, contributing to a collapse of the coffee market. In 2000 the world price of coffee halved and continued to fall during 2001<sup>16</sup>.

Similarly, although it was predicted that prices of agricultural produce would rise following the implementation of the AoA and the North American Free Trade Agreement, they have fallen 'precipitously'.<sup>17</sup> For example, maize prices to Mexican farmers fell from 1300 pesos per ton in 1982 to just under 600 pesos per ton in 1998.

Importantly, trade in primary products from developing countries often brings very few benefits to local communities particularly because little value, if any, can be added locally. In 1992, for example, less than 8 per cent of the sales price of coffee returned to the producer<sup>18</sup>, the remainder going to middlemen such as processors and distributors.

Furthermore, this low-value produce tends to be exported to developed countries for processing, because developed countries impose higher tariffs on processed imports (this tactic, known as tariff escalation, is used to protect their own food processing industries). In other words, the system is rigged so that the value-added benefits accrue to distant countries and corporations in the North.

In short, export-oriented agriculture cannot be expected to lead to food security or sustainable agriculture. What policy changes might?

Firstly, the rules of the agro-industrial game - including the underlying theories adhered to and the flows of investment into specific agricultural sectors and development more generally - need to be reoriented to focus on promoting equitable and sustainable development, ensuring food security, strengthening local food economies, empowering women and establishing diverse sustainable agricultural practices as the norm.

Secondly, the current redistribution of wealth (from South to North) needs to be reversed. Developed countries have incurred an 'ecological debt' to developing countries through the importation of low-priced resources<sup>19</sup> and this debt now far outweighs the official financial debt owed by developing countries. If we are to achieve sustainable agriculture and trade, access to resources and the benefits from their use must be distributed equitably within and between countries, regions and people.

Any such reversal has to be based on a comprehensive and unconditional debt cancellation. This would significantly decrease the need to generate export revenues, including from agriculture, and at the same time release funds to enable developing countries to make progress towards sustainability objectives. Debt cancellation could have profound implications for peoples' food sovereignty, food security and livelihoods. The 1997 Human Development Report estimated that if severely indebted countries no longer had to make annual debt repayments, the funds could be used for investment which in Africa alone could save the lives of around 21 million children by the year 2000 (ie. 7 million lives each year).<sup>20</sup>

Specifically, it is critical that Northern governments:

- **Acknowledge the flaws in the free market principles that underpin perceived comparative advantage, export-led agricultural development and structural adjustment policies and replace those policies with ones that prioritise local, subsistence and sustainability requirements in all countries, using trade-related policies (eg quotas and tariffs) when appropriate to discriminate in favour of more sustainable production methods.**
- **Cancel debt for all developing countries, comprehensively and unconditionally, with targets and timetables, in recognition**

16 | Madeley, J. (2002) Food For All: The Need for a New Agriculture. Zed Books, London.

17 | Murphy, S. (2002) Managing the Invisible Hand: Markets, Farmers and International Trade. Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

18 | Krusch, F. (1998) A Basis for Human Dignity or Just a Good Deal? In Gate: Technology and Development, No. 2, Apr-Jun, pgs. 4-9.

19 | FOEI. (2000) Towards Sustainable Economies: Challenging Neoliberal Economic Globalisation. FOEI, Amsterdam.

20 | Madeley, J. (1999) op cit.

**of the ecological debt that industrialised countries owe the South and which now far outweighs the official financial debt owed by developing countries.**

- **Meet the target of 0.7 percent of GDP to be provided as overseas development assistance (to be given in grant form).**
- **Reorient aid towards capacity building and the provision of micro-projects and micro-enterprises (such as local co-operatives) and sustainable ecological/organic and humane farming. Such projects would include the provision of micro-credits with extension services.**

## **corporate control**

Transnational companies are exerting increasing control over the food system and this threatens peoples' rights of access to resources on an equitable basis. Just a small number of TNCs commonly account for over 80 percent of the trade in an agricultural product.<sup>21</sup> For example, six TNCs account for 85 percent of world grain trade, eight handle 55-60 percent of world coffee sales and just three account for 83 percent of world cocoa trade.<sup>22</sup> TNCs also strive to reduce their costs in order to be internationally competitive. This includes merging their operations, a process that concentrates trade and control over the food system within ever fewer TNCs. Control on this scale can only undermine peoples' efforts to achieve food security and food sovereignty. Governments need to put regulations in place to curb and reduce the power of TNCs, including<sup>23</sup>:

- **High minimum environmental, labour and human rights standards for corporate activities.**
- **Effective international and, where missing, national legislation and mechanisms to prevent the formation and consolidation of monopolies, oligopolies and cartels in food and agricultural systems.**
- **Guaranteed legal rights of redress for citizens and communities adversely affected by corporate activities.**

- **Personal legal liability on company directors for corporate breaches of social and environmental laws and strict legal liability for all harm caused by their products.**
- **International requirements on corporations to seek prior informed consent through democratic processes from those communities likely to be affected by corporate projects or activities, respecting their right to say "no"; and a requirement to carry out social, environmental and economic impact analyses and report in full on these to affected communities.<sup>24</sup>**
- **The implementation of economic policies as outlined above that promote economic subsidiarity and return control of food production to farmers and local communities so they can ensure food security at the local level.**

21 | Madeley, J. (2000) *Hungry for Trade: How the Poor Pay for Free Trade*. Zed Books, London.

22 | Madeley, J. (1999) *Big Business, Poor Peoples*. Zed Books, London.

23 | FOEI (2001) *A Corporate Accountability Mechanism*. A lobby/briefing draft. Friends of the Earth International.

24 | FOEI (2000) *op cit*.

## **promoting diverse sustainable agricultural practices**

Current agricultural practices damage the environment and people's health<sup>25</sup> and therefore need replacing with sustainable land use practices. Attributes reflecting sustainable agriculture include: access to resources for women and men; socially-just forms of agriculture; local knowledge and farmer participation; self-reliance; profitable and efficient production; minimisation of external inputs that damage the environment and human health; the incorporation of natural processes into production; regeneration of on-farm resources; integrated farm management; and conservation of natural resources<sup>26</sup>. Off-farm resources, such as water and nutrients, must be carefully managed. Farm activities should be diverse, including mixed livestock and cropping.

Smaller farms are considered to be more sustainable than their large-scale counterparts<sup>27</sup> and have been found to be between 200 and 1000 percent more productive per unit area than large farms<sup>28</sup>. Yet it is the largest farms in developed countries that benefit from the majority of government subsidies. In the UK during the mid 1990s, 1.3 percent of arable farmers received 10-15 percent of all support, while the smallest farmers – 58 percent of arable farmers – received only one third of all support.<sup>29</sup> The increased productivity of small farms over large farms may be associated with the inefficient use of resources and energy - such as water, oil and nutrients



*Farmer's market in the UK.*

- by large farms which produce less food energy when compared to the amount of resources they consume.

In many parts of the world, modern and traditional attempts at sustainable agriculture are being undermined by inequitable land tenure patterns. Farmers frequently do not have security of tenure because legal ownership of the land belongs to absentee landlords. The first consequence of this is poverty and hunger. However, redistributive land reforms, such as those attempts taking place in Brazil under the leadership of landless farmers movements, have helped increase food security and reduce poverty in developing countries.<sup>30</sup> Another problem of insecure land tenure is that

farmers have little incentive to improve the land through sustainable agricultural practices since they can be easily and legally displaced by absentee landlords and/or industrial farming interests. In view of these factors, communities, peoples and countries should:

- **Phase out domestic subsidies that promote unsustainable land use and inequitable land tenure patterns.**
- **Adopt policies, such as redistributive land reforms, to enable equitable land tenure patterns, taking into account the rights and needs of women.**
- **Encourage sustainable farming techniques through the use of targeted domestic production subsidies, controls and other incentives aimed at socially, environmentally and economically sustainable farming practices. Targets and timetables should include 'special and differential treatment' for developing countries. Measures to ameliorate costs associated with high standards should also be applied (this is a particular problem for small producers).**
- **Have the right to ban or otherwise restrict the production and trade of genetically modified seed, food, animal feeds and related products.**

25 | Pretty, J.N., Brett, C., Gee, D., Hine, R.E., Mason, C.F., Morison, J.I.L., Raven, H., Rayment, M.D. and Van der Bijl, G. (2000) An Assessment of the Total External Costs of UK Agriculture. *Agricultural Systems*, vol.65, pgs.113-136. Howard, V. (2000) The Health Hazards of Global Farming Systems. In: *Local Food, Global Prosperity*. Proceedings of a Conference held at Kensington Town Hall, London, October 12th, International Society for Ecology and Culture, Foxhole, Devon.

26 | Pretty, J.N. (1995) *Regenerating Agriculture: Policies and Practice for Sustainability and Self-Reliance*. Earthscan, London.

27 | D'Souza, G. and Ikerd, J. (1996) Small Farms and Sustainable Development: Is Small More Sustainable? *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics*, vol.28, no.1, pgs.73-83.

28 | Rosset, P. (1999) The Multiple Functions and Benefits of Small Farm Agriculture in the Context of Global Trade Negotiations. *Development*, vol.43, no.2, pgs.77-82.

29 | Pretty, J. (1998) *The Living Land*. Earthscan, London.

30 | Madeley, J. (2002) *Op cit*.

## strengthening local food economies

Industrialised agriculture and long-distance trade benefit from indirect subsidies because food production, processing, transport, distribution and marketing currently do not reflect their full environmental and social costs (eg. pollution resulting from long-distance transport). Despite the environmental and health impacts of long-distance trade, the distance that food travels is steadily increasing: it is now estimated that food travels an average distance of



FoE Australia's organic inner city food coop in Melbourne.

around 1,200 miles between producer and consumer in the US<sup>31</sup>. The distance traveled is exacerbated by the fact that fresh produce is often air-freighted which is particularly energy intensive, using 47 times as much energy to carry a quantity of goods by air as it does by boat<sup>32</sup>, and yet the volume of vegetables air freighted into Britain increased by 15 per cent in just one year between 1993-1994<sup>33</sup>. Overall, between 1980 and 1990, imports of fruit and vegetables air-freighted into the UK

increased by 90 per cent<sup>34</sup>. The increasing miles that food is transported, particularly by air, are contributing to the problems of air pollution and global warming. It is therefore imperative that we seek and develop sustainable local food economies in order to reduce the environmental impacts of long-distance travel.

The real social and environmental costs of agriculture and trade should be internalised in accordance with the polluter pays principle. Trade patterns would then shift in favour of local, national and regional trade, strengthening these economies and protecting the environment both globally and locally. Local and regional self-reliance - to increase local food security and reduce the social and environmental impacts of long-distance trade - should be the goal, which would include greater reliance on local seasonal production. However, for the reasons outlined earlier, it is recognized that some trade will still be necessary and that this must be regulated effectively at the multilateral level, ultimately outside of the WTO. International trade must have as its end goals the achievement of food sovereignty, food security and sustainability. Where possible, any gains from international trade should be used to develop and strengthen sustainable local economies.

Replacing the current model of agricultural production and trade also means that higher farm gate prices are inevitable and it is therefore imperative that policies are put in place to ensure these increased costs are not passed on to poor consumers. This could be

achieved with relative ease given the fact that many food corporations are currently taking an increasing share of the value of food sales, while farmers receive a reduced share. For example, while the food and catering retail price index in the UK has increased by 50 percent since 1987, the price that farmers receive has actually fallen by 3 percent, and in the US corporations take a 79 percent share of every dollar spent on domestically produced food while farmers receive a mere 21 percent<sup>35</sup>. To take another example, in 1999, while UK farmers received less than the cost of production for potatoes, supermarkets were selling them at around five times the price they paid to farmers, a situation also experienced with many other farm products<sup>36</sup>. Affordable food for all must be a key component, but again this can be achieved through the effective regulation of corporations. To this end, communities, peoples and countries should:

- **Ensure that the increased internalised costs of production are met by the polluter (particularly those practising large-scale monocropping and high-input, export oriented industrial production) and, where appropriate, passed on to processors and retailers.**
- **Ensure that revenues from polluter pays taxes are targeted at sustainable agricultural practices so as to facilitate the move away from unsustainable farming.**

31 | Imhoff, D. (1996) Community Supported Agriculture: Farming with a Face on It. In: Mander, J. and Goldsmith, E. (eds) *The Case Against the Global Economy and For a Turn Towards the Local*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, pgs.425-433. Norberg-Hodge, H. (1995) *From Catastrophe to Community*, in *Resurgence*, Jul-Aug, Issue 171, pgs. 12-14.

32 | Lang, T. and Hines, C. (1993) *The New Protectionism: Protecting the Future Against Free-Trade*, Earthscan, London.

33 | de Selincourt, K. (1997) *Local Harvest: Delicious Ways to Save the Planet*. Lawrence and Wishart, London.

34 | Department of Transport statistics quoted in Lucas, C. (2001) *Stopping the great food swap: relocalising Europe's food supply*. The Greens / European Free Alliance, European Parliament.

35 | Gorelick, S. (2000) *Facing the Farm Crisis*. The Ecologist: Special Supplement, vol.30, no.4, pgs.28-31.

36 | McCarthy, M. (1999) *Why Britain's Farmers are Making a Loss on Nearly Everything They Grow*. The Independent, Saturday August 28th, p.3.

- **Address poverty issues to ensure that policies leading to higher food prices do not disadvantage the poorest sections of society, particularly women and children.**
- **Regulate retailers to ensure they pay a fair price to farmers, sell food at a fair price and do not make excessive profits at the expense of either producers or consumers.**
- **Reduce the length of food chains for localised economies to benefit both producers and consumers.**

## **ensuring access to resources**

Access to resources should be considered a basic human right. Farmers' Rights over resources have arisen from their past, present and future role in conserving, improving and making available plant genetic resources.<sup>37</sup> Yet the WTO's agreement on Trade Related Intellectual Property rights (TRIPs) is undermining farmers' and communities' rights.

Members of the WTO are obliged, through the TRIPs Agreement, to protect intellectual property of plant varieties and micro-biological processes through the use of patents or an effective sui generis system, or a combination of both. On the back of this process, large agri-business companies are increasingly being granted Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) protection over seeds so that such rights are being concentrated within a handful of powerful corporations. For example, just three companies – Cargill, Pioneer and CP-DeKalb – control 70 percent of the Asian seed market.<sup>38</sup> These processes undermine the basic human right of access to resources.

Now farmers are being encouraged to use uniform varieties of IPR protected seeds and prevented from exchanging those seeds. This may lead to a reduction in agro-genetic diversity as well as in the varieties of crops grown locally. This will have negative impacts on local food sovereignty and food security as well as sustainability since diversity underpins sustainable agriculture. Communities should have the right to exert control over, and therefore have access to, local and shared natural resources.

In order to meet the fundamental right of access to resources, communities, peoples and countries should:

- **Recognise and enforce Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' legal and customary rights to make decisions concerning their local, traditional resources, even where no legal rights have previously been allocated.**
- **Ensure equitable access to land, seeds, water, credit and other productive resources, for small farmers, in particular women.**
- **Prohibit all forms of patenting on life in order to protect peoples' rights over access to resources.**
- **Protect farmers', Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' rights over plant genetic resources and associated knowledge, including farmers' rights to exchange and reproduce seeds.**

37 | ActionAid. Food Rights: Re-writing the Trade Rules. ActionAid, London.

38 | ActionAid. Op cit.

## conserving biodiversity

Biodiversity, which is critical to sustainable farming, is under threat from large-scale industrialised agriculture that is the main cause of the destruction of natural ecosystems, such as forests, wetlands and prairies. Land conversion, agro-chemical use, the introduction of invasive species and the inequitable distribution and unsustainable use of freshwater resources for irrigation are primarily responsible for alarming rates of global biodiversity loss.

Biodiversity in natural ecosystems has been replaced with simplified systems of just a few crops<sup>39</sup>, an ever shrinking number of animal races and most food produced now comes from an increasingly narrow genetic base<sup>40</sup>. Reliance on so few crops in industrialised farming has resulted in the loss of 75 percent of the genetic diversity of agricultural crops since 1900<sup>41</sup>.

Agricultural genetic diversity is also fundamental to food security since a diverse range of crop types and varieties grown together helps resist pest attacks and minimises the risk of every crop species being lost, while monocropping conversely provides areas of food where pests can thrive<sup>42</sup>. At the global level, it is now recognised that biodiversity loss is occurring at rates that are unprecedented since the last glacial period. Policies need to be put in place to encourage diverse sustainable agricultural practices.

Sustainable agriculture can increase biodiversity since this system is generally associated with a diversity of crop varieties and types, which in turn supports a wider variety of plant, insect and animal species. Sustainable farming techniques are such that they enable biodiversity to flourish within and surrounding the crops. These systems, particularly organic farming, are widely reported to support greater biodiversity, employ more people and thus enhance the wider rural community<sup>43</sup>.

To this end, communities, peoples and countries should:

- **Promote the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices that reduce and reverse the loss of biodiversity.**
- **Protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, farmers and communities to save their own seeds.**
- **Protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, farmers and communities to develop their own landraces.**
- **Recognize the vital role of women in the conservation and development of biodiversity and respect their rights and needs in this regard.**

- **Reform the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and national policies to provide incentives to farm the land to increase the biodiversity and social benefits of agriculture<sup>44</sup>.**

39 | Altieri, M.A. (1998) Ecological Impacts of Industrial Agriculture and the Possibilities for Truly Sustainable Farming. *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine*, vol.50, no.3, pgs.60-71. Ponting, C. (1992) Foreword, to Conford, P. (ed) *A Future for the Land: Organic Practice from a Global Perspective*, Green Books, Hartland, Bideford, Devon, pgs. ix-xii.

40 | Lang, T. (1999) Towards a Sustainable Food Policy. In: Tansey, G. and D'Silva, J. (eds) *The Meat Business: Devouring a Hungry Planet*, Earthscan, London, pgs. 120-135.

41 | FAO (2002) *Food Security and the Environment*. FAO, Rome. Available at: [www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit/fsheet/environment.pdf](http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit/fsheet/environment.pdf).

42 | Cherfas, J. (1996) *Seed Savers Unite!* In: Cherfas, J., Fanton, M. and Fanton, J. *The Seed Savers' Handbook*, Grover Books, UK, pgs.13-22. Emerson, C. (1998) *Potatoes, People and Pollution*. SAFE Alliance, London.

43 | Cobb, D., Feber, R., Hopkins, A. and Stockdale, L. (1998) *Organic Farming Study*. Global Environmental Change Programme Briefings, No.17, March. Cobb, D., Feber, R., Hopkins, A., Stockdale, L., O'Riordan, T., Clements, B., Firbank, L., Goulding, K., Jarvis, S. and Macdonald, D. (1999) *Integrating the Environmental and Economic Consequences of Converting to Organic Agriculture: Evidence From a Case Study*. *Land Use Policy*, vol.16, no.4, pgs.207-221. Hird, V. (1997) *Double Yield: Jobs and Sustainable Food Production*. SAFE Alliance, London.

44 | For more information about CAP reform please see: <http://www.choosefoodchoosefarming.org/index.htm>.

## **improving food safety and quality**

Policies promoting diverse sustainable agricultural practices will ensure that food is safer and healthier than it would have been had it been produced by high chemical-input industrialised agriculture.

In the WTO, food quality is dealt with primarily by the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) rules that determine which measures are necessary to protect human, animal and plant life and health. WTO members are also encouraged to use international food standards such as those of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. However, the SPS severely limits the application of the precautionary principle, while the Codex is so heavily influenced by food and chemical corporations that the standards it sets may be lower than those already in place in many nations. To further enhance food safety and quality, communities, peoples and countries should:

- **Establish mechanisms that assist local food producers to meet high (and often expensive) environmental, social and health standards.**
- **Develop quality criteria that are appropriate to the preferences and needs of people.**
- **Agree to fundamental reform of the international Codex Alimentarius Commission.**
- **Introduce clear and accurate labeling of food and agricultural products, underpinned by consumer' and farmers' rights to know and their access to information.**



*Agriculture in the valley of Moquegua, Peru is threatened by the planned Quellaveco mine five kilometres away.*



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**friends of the earth international secretariat**

po box 19199, 1000 gd amsterdam, the netherlands  
tel: 31 20 622 1369. fax: 31 20 639 2181. email: [foei@foei.org](mailto:foei@foei.org)

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