



EUROPEAN COORDINATION VIA CAMPESINA

# FOOD SOVEREIGNTY NOW!

A GUIDE TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



# CONTENTS

---

1. Food Sovereignty – “A concept in action”	p.1
2. FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AROUND THE WORLD	p.4
a. Origins	p.4
b. Food Governance at the International Level	p.8
c. The Food Sovereignty Movement	p.11
d. The Nyéléni Forum	p.13
e. The Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty	p.14
3. FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN EUROPE	p.16
a. The European Perspective	p.16
b. The Nyéléni Europe Forums	p.18
c. Agroecology – a path to Food Sovereignty	p.19
d. Distribution Chains	p.21
e. The Right to Land, Seeds, Natural Resources and the Commons	p.22
f. Trade	p.23
g. Women and Youth	p.24
4. Food Sovereignty around the world	p.27
5. Links	p.28

## “A concept in action”

Food Sovereignty offers itself as a process of building social movements and empowering peoples to organise their societies in ways that transcend the neoliberal vision of a world of commodities, markets and selfish economic actors. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the myriad of complex problems we face in today’s world. Instead, Food Sovereignty is a process that adapts to the people and places where it is put in practice. Food Sovereignty means solidarity, not competition, and building a fairer world from the bottom up.

Food is a fundamental need - access to food is essential to human survival and a basic human right. In our current society we see both a disregard for this right on one hand and a taking for granted of it on the other – for many in the overdeveloped world food seems abundant, yet that abundance rests on the fragile structures of a highly damaging and controlled food and agriculture system.

Food is also political – the production of, access to and distribution of food are essential for our society to function and control of our food system confers power. Political forces have worked for many years to control all aspects of food production systems and bring the cycle of food production, from seeds, inputs, land and other necessities under centralized and increasingly privatized control.

Trade in foodstuffs – the exchange and transport of food from one human population to another – is also a highly politicized and complex process. Control of the rules and regulations governing international and inter-regional trade confers even greater power and leverage.

In spite of the political and economic pressures they face, human beings continue to manage and nurture the ecosystems around them to ensure a food supply. For thousands of years peasant farmers, pastoralists and other

peoples who live from the land and sea have developed and refined resilient food and water systems, plant and animal breeds and cultivated plant varieties to ensure their continuation and long term sustainability.

The 20th century saw massive increases in mechanization and the increasing industrialisation of food production. Use of artificial and chemical inputs in farming and food processing have proliferated, and large agricultural companies and neo-colonial states and regions have increased their market share and power.



Peasants working the land,  
Mozambique.  
By Nick Pajet.

In the face of these developments, Food Sovereignty has emerged from peasant organizations organized at the transnational level as a proposal for humanity to rethink how we organize food and agricultural production, distribution and trade, how we make use of land and aquatic resources and how we interact, exchange and organise with one another. Food Sovereignty is not a simple set of technical solutions or a formula which can be applied – it is instead a “process in action” – an invitation to citizens to exercise our capacity to organize ourselves and improve our conditions and societies together.

The concept of Food Sovereignty was developed by the people most threatened by the processes of the consolidation of power in food and agricultural systems, – peasant farmers. Instead of being destroyed by the forces of history they are offering a proposal to solve the multiple crises which humanity is facing.

Food Sovereignty is about systemic change – about human beings having direct, democratic control over the most important elements of their society – how we feed and nourish ourselves, how we use and maintain the land, water and other resources around us for the benefit of current and future generations, and how we interact with other groups, peoples and cultures. This guide aims to show the context in which Food Sovereignty emerged and how it has developed. It is a guide both for those new to Food Sovereignty and those attempting to apply it to their realities, be they local, regional or global.

## AROUND THE WORLD

*“The majority of the 570 million farms in the world are small. Smallholders supply 80% of overall food produced in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America through farmers, artisan fisher folk, pastoralists, landless and indigenous people. In addition, 70% of the 1.4 billion extremely poor people live in rural areas and 75% of these rural poor are also smallholders.”*

***Report from the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)<sup>1</sup>***

*“The Right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement”.  
General Comment No. 12 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the UN*

*“Food sovereignty is a condition for the full realization of the right to food.”*

***Former Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Oliver De Schutter 2014<sup>2</sup>***

### A. Origins

Food Sovereignty emerged as a response and alternative to the neoliberal model of corporate globalization. As such, it is Internationalist in character, and provides a framework for understanding and transforming international governance around food and agriculture.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fao.org/cfs/home/activities/smallholders/en/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20140310\\_finalreport\\_en.pdf](http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20140310_finalreport_en.pdf)



II International Conference of LVC, Tlaxcala/Mexico (1996) , where food sovereignty was discussed for the first time. LVC's archive.

La Via Campesina launched the concept of Food Sovereignty in 1996 at the Rome Civil Society Organisation Forum that was organized by an autonomous

International Planning Committee made up of civil society organisations. The final declaration of this parallel NGO forum - "Profit for few or food for all" - was presented to the World Food Summit organized by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN (FAO) in the same year. Food Sovereignty was proposed in reaction to the term "food security" (see box) which was the term used by the majority of NGOs and governments when talking about food and agriculture. Food sovereignty also contested the food and agricultural trade agenda promoted at the time by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

*The globalisation of the world economy, along with the lack of accountability of transnational corporations and spreading patterns of overconsumption have increased world poverty. Today's global economy is characterised by unemployment, low wages, destruction of rural economies, and bankruptcy of family farmers.*

*Industrialised agriculture, intensive animal husbandry methods, and overfishing are destroying traditional farming, poisoning the planet and all living beings. Subsidized exports, artificially low prices, constant dumping, and even some food aid programmes are increasing food insecurity and making people dependent on food they are unable to produce. The depletion of global grain stocks has increased market instability, to the detriment of small producers*



Food Sovereignty challenges the WTO approach - bringing a new human rights based framework to the discussion about how peoples and countries interact with one another in terms of agricultural and food trade and production. Food Sovereignty sees food and agriculture, ecosystems and cultures as being intrinsically linked – a breakdown in one system will likely imply a breakdown in another. It offers a way of thinking which celebrates diversity and values the work of food production in all societies and places. For peasant farmers and their allies, opposing the WTO was a way of protecting an entire way of life based on sustainable use of resources and food production.

*“The conventional term of “food security” was inadequate. This was about more than producing more food or distributing it more efficiently. We were grappling with fundamental questions of power and democracy: Who controls food producing resources such as land, water, seeds and genetics and for what purposes? Who gets to decide what is grown, how and where it is grown and for whom? We needed to have language that expressed the political dimensions of our struggle... “Food Sovereignty...provokes the necessary discourse about power, freedom, democracy, equality, justice, sustainability and culture. Food is taken out of the realm of being primarily a market commodity and re-embedded in the social, ecological, cultural and local contexts as a source of nutrition, livelihood, meaning and relationships.”*

***Nettie Webb, Canada – Nyéléni newsletter no. 30***

***FOOD SOVEREIGNTY VS FOOD SECURITY “YOU CAN HAVE FOOD SECURITY IN A PRISON OR A DICTATORSHIP, BUT YOU CAN NEVER HAVE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY”***

*Food sovereignty is different from food security in both approach and politics. Food security does not distinguish where food comes from, or the conditions under which it is produced and distributed. National food security targets are often met by sourcing food produced under*

*environmentally destructive and exploitative conditions, and supported by subsidies and policies that destroy local food producers but benefit agribusiness corporations. Food sovereignty emphasizes ecologically appropriate production, distribution and consumption, social-economic justice and local food systems as ways to tackle hunger and poverty and guarantee sustainable food security for all peoples.*

*Nyeléni Newsletter no. 13*

## **B. Food Governance at the International Level:**

### **The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)**

The IPC is an International Food Sovereignty platform, where different food producer groups (fisherfolk, young people, small farmers, indigenous peoples) can participate together and find common analyses and solutions to problems they face. The IPC has been instrumental in helping civil society groups engage better with the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the UN. The FAO is an inter-governmental institution, with one country, one vote. It helps to shape regional and national level food and agricultural policies.



Demonstration for Land and Dignity with IPC, Rome (2002). LVC's archive

## **The Committee on Food Security (CFS) of the FAO**

The CFS was reformed in 2009 following the world Food Price crisis of 2007-08. Civil society groups (such as producers and others) successfully used the reform to carve out their space to actively participate in a more open discussion on the global governance of food and agriculture systems internationally. These reforms, proposed and supported by the IPC and the governments of Argentina, the Philippines and Brazil, have now created the first and entirely original truly participatory space for civil society organisations within a UN institution. The CFS may offer a template for increasing civil society participation in other UN bodies.

An example of an outcome of this process are the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGTs). Ratified in 2012, These guidelines provide support for organisations around the globe struggling to secure access to natural resources for food production.

## **The Right to Food**

The Right to Food is a Human Right. It protects the right of all human beings to live in dignity, free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. This right implies legal obligations for states:

- The obligation to respect- requires governments not to take any measures that arbitrarily deprive people of their right to food, for example by measures preventing people from having access to food.
- The obligation to protect means that states should enforce appropriate laws and take other relevant measures to prevent third parties, including individuals and corporations, from violating the right to food of others.
- The obligation to fulfil (facilitate and provide) entails that governments must pro-actively engage in activities intended to strengthen people's access to and utilization of resources so as to facilitate their ability to feed themselves. As a last resort, whenever an individual or group is unable to enjoy the right to adequate food for reasons beyond their control, states have the obligation to fulfil that right directly.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food is responsible for assessing if states are meeting their obligations – they report to the Human Rights Council of the UN.

## The UN Declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas

La Via Campesina, in alliance with other rural constituencies, human rights and social justice NGOs, have succeeded in getting the UN Human Rights Council to initiate negotiations on a new international Human Rights instrument to protect the rights of peasant and other people working in rural areas. This instrument, if adopted, will recognize new human rights for peasants and other rural working people including the right to land, right to seeds, right to biodiversity, right a decent income, livelihood and the means of production and the right to food sovereignty. The text recognizes both individual and collective rights.

*“It is needed in international law; it will improve the fight against hunger; it is a means of protecting small-scale family owned farms from the pressure of large, agro-industrial farms; and it will increase access to the means of production in rural areas...[it] would increase visibility on rights already recognised in international law, and help recognise new rights, such as the rights to land, seeds and compensation for losses due to food subsidies given to farmers in other countries”*

***Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Olivier de Schutter talking about the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas***

*“After eight years of internal discussion, LVC presented in 2009 its own declaration on the rights of peasants – women and men– in which they succinctly expressed their aspirations and demands.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after, in 2010, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) mandated its Advisory Committee to elaborate a study on ways and means to further advance the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.<sup>4</sup> The study recommends “(a) to better implement existing international norms, (b) to address the normative gaps under international human rights law, and (c) to elaborate a new legal instrument on the rights of people working in rural areas” (Par. 63). In September 2012, the HRC passed a resolution establishing an inter-governmental*

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://viacampesina.net/downloads/PDF/EN-3.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Final study of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee (on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas), UN doc. A/HRC/19/75, 24 February 2012.

*working group with the mandate to elaborate a draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas”*

*Nyeléni Newsletter no. 30*

In 2018, after a long process with four intergovernmental working groups held in Geneva, new drafts using “agreed language “ and references to other official texts, the declaration is reaching a crucial stage for its adoption.



Demonstration for the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, Geneva (May 2017).

By Eric Roset.

### **C. The Food Sovereignty Movement**

Food Sovereignty can be thought of as both an alternative to and firm rejection of the neoliberal model of corporate-led globalization. It can be understood as a new democratic demand of citizens.

Food Sovereignty encompasses movements which work for agroecology and peasant seed systems, climate and environmental justice, peasants’ rights, agrarian reform and dignity and the rights of migrants and waged workers, fisher peoples and others. It is this convergence of struggles and movements which defines Food Sovereignty and gives it depth and strength across not just international borders, but across different social and economic sectors as well. There is growing international consensus that Food Sovereignty can become a real articulation of the many alternatives social movements offer and fight for around the world.

Since its inception, women have been at the heart of food sovereignty. La Via Campesina members have consistently attempted to subvert the traditional models of male dominance in agricultural organisations by creating spaces organised by and for women. This process has empowered peasant women from across the globe who are at the frontline in the struggle for Food Sovereignty. The struggle for Food Sovereignty is also a struggle for women's rights.

*From our understanding it is impossible to achieve people's food sovereignty in the framework of the capitalist and patriarchal system... what that means is we need to build a popular program based on solidarity, on social, gender and environmental justice and on food sovereignty.*

**Diego Montón, Operative Secretariat - CLOC-Vía Campesina, Nyéléni newsletter no. 30**

Often Food Sovereignty means building a new reality - new systems of producing, exchanging and consuming, - together, from the ground up, while challenging the existing structures of corporate power and control.

*Food sovereignty makes sense for people in both rural and urban areas, and poor and wealthy countries. It is as much a space of resistance to neoliberalism, free market capitalism, destructive trade and investment, as a space to build democratic food and economic systems, and just and sustainable futures. Its transformative power has been acknowledged by the Special Rapporteurs to the Right to food, Jean Ziegler and Olivier de Schutter, and in key policy documents such as the IAASTD (International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development).*

**Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South, Nyéléni newsletter no. 13**

## D. The Nyéléni Forum

The struggle for Food Sovereignty is a collective struggle, and cannot be achieved by one single social group. Building and developing alliances at a local, regional and international level is fundamental in order to build a movement working towards shared goals.

It was with this in mind that the Food Sovereignty movement organized the International Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007 in Selingué, Mali. The forum was organized in a horizontal, participatory way, with a steering group made up of peasant organisations, environmental NGOs, women's movements and others. This diversity was also reflected in the six sectors represented at the forum; peasants and small farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, workers and migrant workers, and consumer and urban movements.

The goals of the Forum were to strengthen the Food Sovereignty movement by deepening its' collective understanding of food sovereignty, broadening capacity for common action and solidarity, learning from one another, thinking strategically about local and international arenas of struggle, and rooting the work of the movement in the diversity of peoples, places, cultures and struggles which it represented. Attendees at the forum were involved in preparations and financed their own participation, ensuring a collective ownership and direction. There was a quota to ensure a balanced participation of women, youth, farmers and other groups.



Nyéleni Forum, Selingué/Mali (2007). By Tineke N'Haese

The outcome of the forum – the **Nyéléni Declaration for Food Sovereignty of 2007** (see **The Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty**) – has become the main platform for citizens groups supporting Food Sovereignty around the world, and an international reference point for discussions on Food Sovereignty.

## E. The six pillars of food sovereignty

### **SIX PILLARS OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (Nyéléni Declaration)(Nyéléni Forum, Mali 2007)**

*1. **Focuses on Food for People:** Food sovereignty puts the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies; and rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.*

*2. **Values Food Providers:** Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food; and rejects those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.*

*3. **Localises Food Systems:** Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms; and resists governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.*

*4. **Puts Control Locally:** Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share*

*them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity; it recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities; and rejects the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.*

**5. Builds Knowledge and Skills:** *Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organisations that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations; and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.*

**6. Works with Nature:** *Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us; and, rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.*



## IN EUROPE

### A. The European Perspective

Europe is the largest importer and exporter of food in the world, and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the European Union's most important piece of joint legislation. It has shaped food and agriculture in Europe since it was first introduced in 1962 and continues to have a variety of impacts on citizens all over the world.

Unfortunately, the main original aims of the CAP - to guarantee minimum production in Europe to ensure a food supply and secure livelihoods for food producers - have largely been replaced with a more geopolitical and globalized orientation - with impacts far beyond European borders.

Repeated reforms of the CAP in the 20th century have focused on the “modernization” of European agriculture, rewarding production and supporting larger more industrialized farm units that are often owned by private companies and investors. The CAP has succeeded in turning Europe into a food and agriculture powerhouse - increasing and industrializing agricultural production as well as processing capacities. This has been accompanied by massive increases in the market share of supermarkets and large distributors.

However, these successes have come at a huge price. European agriculture has lost hundreds of thousands of farms and farm livelihoods - one third of farms have disappeared in Europe in the last ten years. An overproduction of meat and dairy is almost entirely dependent on imported animal feeds, mostly GM soya from Latin America and the US. Huge increases in chemical use have had catastrophic impacts on ecosystems across the continent. Healthy food is less accessible to citizens as processed foods become increasingly prevalent and retailers control distribution markets. Hybrid crops bred for uniformity and shelf life have replaced highly nutritious traditional seed varieties.



60th anniversary of the CAP – Demonstration for Food Sovereignty, Rome (March 2017). ECVC's archive.

Europe, so proud of its food and culinary heritage, is failing its citizens, its food providers and its natural environment. It is time for a new Common Agricultural Policy based on Food Sovereignty that addresses the needs of citizens, not the profit seeking aspirations of corporations.

Food Sovereignty in Europe is part of the larger struggle for a more social and more democratic and citizen-centred development of policy. It is about developing food and agricultural policies with the direct participation of citizens, in ways that ensure a quality food supply, protect ecosystems and bring social justice to the entire food chain.

Food Sovereignty means basing trade relations on solidarity, not competition - the right to protect European markets but also the obligation not to interfere in the same process for other peoples – allowing trading partners to develop food policies and programmes for their own realities, free from dumping and external interference.

Food Sovereignty implies using market measures, subsidies and supports to build food and agriculture systems that are in the interests of European citizens, without negative effects in third countries.

The EU already employs market measures, supports and subsidies – but many of these are targeted towards maintaining the agro-industrial model of agricultural production that is failing people and the planet.

European citizens are already building alternative food systems, finding a myriad of ways to break down the dominance of large agribusinesses in the food chain. Farmers, environmental groups, social justice organisations, workers unions, consumer groups and other organizations are constructing alternatives to the current model and organizing for change.



Producers' market, France.  
Campagnes Solidaires' archive.

## B. The Nyéléni Europe Forums

Organizations working towards Food Sovereignty in Europe - farmers, environmentalists, social justice organizations and others came together in 2011 to organize the first European Food Sovereignty Forum– the Nyéléni Europe Forum. A second Forum was held in Cluj-Napoca in Romania in 2016. The Nyéléni Europe Forums have been organized with the same methodologies and constituencies as the Food Sovereignty Forum in Mali in 2007, with each participating delegation contributing to the costs of the forum, and quotas to ensure a balanced representation of farmers, women, young people and other groups (for example workers, NGOs, CSAs and urban collectives).

The European Forums worked with five thematic axes. These were **Production and Consumption**: Changing how food is produced and consumed,

**Distribution:** Changing how food is distributed, **Work and Social Conditions:** Valuing work and improving social conditions in food and agricultural systems, **Natural Resources and the Commons:** Reclaiming the right to natural resources and the Commons, and **Public Policies:** Changing public policies governing our food and agricultural systems.

The first **Nyeléni** Europe Forum of 2011 produced a declaration that articulated a vision for Food Sovereignty in Europe. The second Forum in 2016 focused on developing an action plan to build joint objectives and focus the energies of the Food Sovereignty movement. The reports of these forum can be found online at [www.nyelenieurope.net](http://www.nyelenieurope.net).



1



2



3

1. Nyéléni Europe Forum – Opening session, Krems Austria (2011). By Anna Korzensky
2. Second Nyéléni Europe Forum – Plenary session pannel, Cluj Romania (2016). By Ecoruralis
3. Second Nyéléni Europe Forum – Plenary session, Cluj Romania (2016). By Ecoruralis

### C. Agroecology – a path to Food Sovereignty

Agroecology is concerned with where food comes from, how it is produced, who produces it and how knowledge and skills around food and agriculture are shared. It accompanies this understanding of food and agricultural production with a social, cultural and political context – drawing a picture of our different agricultures, and celebrating their diversity. It provides a holistic understanding of our place in natural cycles and how our farming systems must adapt to and enhance the ecosystems and societies they depend on.

In Europe, building Agroecology means also building the capacity of practitioners of agroecological farming systems to exchange with one another, and to build public policy frameworks which support agroecology and soil health. Of particular importance is the development of low to zero input farming systems and resilient rural economies where food and farming



practices are integrated into natural processes and ecosystems according to their geographical and climatic area.

Organiclea: A workers' co-operative on the edge of London, UK. Landworkers Alliance's archive.

*“Diverse forms of smallholder food production based on agroecology generate local knowledge, promote social justice, nurture identity and culture, and strengthen the economic viability of rural areas....*

*...the production practices of agroecology are based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales. Agroecology drastically reduces our use of externally-purchased inputs that must be bought from industry. In agroecology there is no use of agrottoxins, artificial hormones, GMOs or other dangerous new technologies...*

*We must build our own local food systems that create new rural-urban links, based on truly agroecological food production by peasants, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, urban farmers, etc...we see [agroecology] as the essential alternative to the industrial model, and as the means of transforming how we produce and consume food into something better for humanity and our Mother Earth.”*

*Edited EXCERPTS from  
Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology  
Nyéléni, Mali, 27 February 2015*

## D. Distribution Chains

One of the most important changes in food systems in the last 50 years has been in the distribution sector. Citizens' food supply is highly controlled - large retailers, distributors and their subsidiaries have become the primary sales point for citizens to access food, and they also exert an enormous influence on the rest of the food system.

Retailers have shaped food habits and agricultural practices to suit their business model. Highly processed foods have replaced natural products. Supermarkets demand uniformity of shape, colour and size in their vegetables and fruits, and seed companies have responded by breeding varieties that prioritise shelf-life and colour over nutrition and taste. Retailers determine prices, markets and through publicity and below-cost selling, even shopping habits. Across Europe many people are resisting this and instead supporting their local and regional markets and producers. An abundance of community food hubs, community supported agriculture projects, cooperatives, buyers clubs and other systems have emerged as a citizen-led response to the governance failure in food distribution and production.

According to recent statistics, Community Supported Agriculture (where consumers commit to a farm or farmer for a season) alone provides food to as many as half a million EU citizens. On average, 15% of EU farms sell more than half of their production directly to consumers. The benefits of such short-scale distribution are becoming increasingly clear. EU citizens agree - four out of five say that strengthening the farmer's role in the food chain is important.<sup>5</sup>

While there are commonalities to these systems and new supply chains, in many ways these initiatives are as diverse and varied as European food and agriculture itself, and they find their voice through the Nyéléni Food Sovereignty movement.

*From the point of view of consumers, food sovereignty is a key right in order to obtain a full and dignified life. It is difficult to consider ourselves as living in dignity if there is limited autonomy of choice about how we feed ourselves.*

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586650/EPRS\\_BRI\(2016\)586650\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586650/EPRS_BRI(2016)586650_EN.pdf)

*Today the globalized market, in the hands of transnational corporations, inundates us with ultra processed products that make us sick, while associating such products with progress and being a citizen of the 21st century. This leads to the disappearance of not only other forms of foodstuffs which are more suitable to our real needs, but also progressively of small farmers and peasants.*

*...we should not forget the role and capacity which public policies have of choosing (or not) our foodstuffs, as well as the need that these policies become the fruit of participatory processes among all citizens and not the result of pressure applied by large transnational corporations which have little or nothing to do with human necessities.*

**Isa Alvarez, URGENCI**  
*Nyéleni Newsletter Food Sovereignty no. 30*

## **E. The Right to Land, Seeds, Natural Resources and the Commons**

If we look around us we can see the enclosure of the commons everywhere – privatisation of genetic resources from seeds to animal breeds, privatisation and landgrabbing of lands, waters and other resources, and the dominance of agribusinesses at almost every link in the food chain. At the same time it is around the defense and protection of these resources that European citizens are at their most active, demanding both the right to reproduce and share genetic resources for food production, but also to collectively access and share resources in their areas.

With more than half of EU farmland controlled by only 3% of farms, land grabbing is a very real threat to both the social structure of rural areas and the capacity to build sustainable food systems in the future. Once lost, rural agrarian cultures are slow to re-establish themselves. The CAP has created a situation where rich states and their agribusinesses appropriate huge tracts of land in poorer member states. This landgrabbing eliminates those agri-cultures and threatens the future viability of the European project.

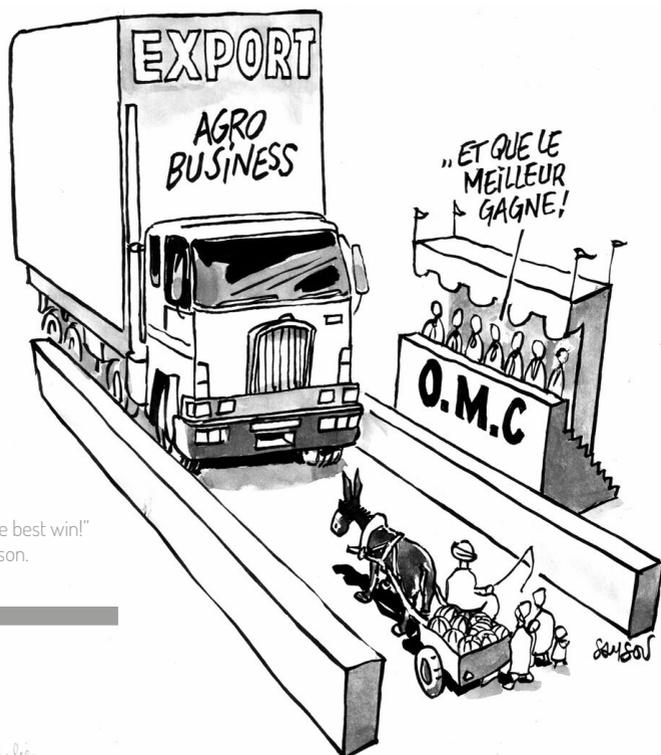
Peasants' seeds.  
LVC's archive.



## F. Trade

Since the failure of the WTO the EU has aggressively pursued bilateral trade agreements with the United States, South Korea, Colombia, Canada, MERCOSUR and many other areas and nation states. Often these agreements include aggressive market access for European overproduction of agricultural products, threatening the livelihood of farmers in those areas, or enable access to EU markets for external agribusiness forces, threatening the livelihoods of farmers in Europe.

Food Sovereignty in Europe means building a new farming model which reverses the application of industrial processes to food production, ensures quality food for people in Europe, reverses the disappearance of European farms, supports new farmers and farming methods based on agroecology, guarantees farmers can make a living from their production and protects agricultural workers. Currently trade policies are acting against almost all of these objectives.



WTO - "May the best win!"  
By Pierre Samson.

Trade imbalances also exist within Europe. Agribusinesses concentrate production in certain geographical areas, often at the expense of other areas, which find their local agriculture unable to compete. Public subsidies should not support agribusiness expansion in one geographical area that acts detrimentally to the economy and social fabric of another.

The principles of International Trade based on Food Sovereignty – the right to define an agricultural and food system and the obligation not to interfere with other countries’ or regions’ agricultural systems - means basing trade on solidarity instead of competition. Food Sovereignty seeks to radically change the movements of goods and services internationally so as to ensure people’s rights are fulfilled, rather than to enrich agribusiness corporations. It sees the need for European trade policy to be radically reoriented in the direction of food sovereignty if the EU wishes to retain its legitimacy both internally and globally.

## G. Women and Youth

*“The seeds we sow in the present will feed us in the future. The land is fertile and ready.”*

***“La Via Campesina VII International Conference: Youth Assembly Declaration”***

There is a predominance of men in agricultural organisations, policy bodies, agribusinesses and other areas in Europe and globally, which hides the huge amount of work and labour undertaken by women in farms across Europe, much of which goes unrecognised or quantified.

A reorganisation of this should see women taking their rightful equal place in participating in discussions and decisions about food and agriculture policies.

Patriarchy and age discrimination restricts visibility and participation of youth in decision-making processes. Hand-in-hand with mainstream media the false notion that there is no future in the agrarian sector continues to be propagated. The countryside in Europe has an ageing population and this has big impacts for the present and future of Humanity.

Young people also need supports to access land and establish new farms, many of which are innovative and are bringing life back into rural areas. This means promoting the democratization of our societies and the full participation of youth in political and decision-making processes.

Farming should be a respected profession where farmers can ensure a living from their production in a thriving rural environment – vital in order to make farming attractive for new entrants. This means changes in how we teach agriculture and to the functioning of state research, development and training bodies, as well as broader support for rural social and economic development.



Bienenwerder: Collective farming in Germany. OLiB e.V.'s archive.

*Women are a driving force for the maintenance, conservation and development of rural areas, both in cultural and economic terms. Not only do they contribute to the preservation and handing down of traditions but they also represent a considerable proportion of the workforce in agriculture and support the development of rural areas in the face of a constant process of depopulation.*

*Unfortunately, due to the predominance of certain conditions in rural areas, such as unemployment, poverty, poor transport and lack of basic educational, health and care services, and to the persistence of a traditional mentality imposing stereotyped roles for women and men and confining women to a subordinate role in both private and public life, women in rural areas are confronted with major challenges in the achievement of gender equality and the enjoyment of their rights.*

**Council of Europe Resolution 1806 (2011)**



Peasants at work - France.  
By Georges Bartoli



Asian Fishing, Thailand.  
Assembly of Poors archive.



Feeding pigs, UK. Landworkers  
Alliance's archive.



Amrita Bhoomi agroecology  
school, Karnataka India.  
By D.Meek



## Around The World

Around the world, a number of countries have adopted food sovereignty as a political framework, in their constitutions, policies and programmes. In 2008, Ecuador was the first country to recognize food sovereignty in its constitution. Since then, other countries have followed including Senegal, Mali, Bolivia, Nepal, Venezuela, and most recently Egypt (2014). In all of these countries, implementation of food sovereignty presents important challenges. As the first country on the European continent, civil society in Switzerland is now undertaking a process to have food sovereignty recognized in the national constitution.

Food Sovereignty cannot be interpreted as Food Security, or Food Sufficiency. Food Sovereignty means an explicit transformation of the fundamental relationships underpinning our economies and societies. It means solidarity between peoples instead of competition, and recognition of our shared responsibilities. It does not mean closing our economies or simple re-localisation. It is not a policy in itself, or a simple one size fits all solution. It is instead the commitment of people to make things better by working and organising and creating new realities together. Food Sovereignty is at the basis of human agency and is in itself a celebration of our collective humanity.

<https://nyeleni.org>

<https://nyelenieurope.net>

<https://viacampesina.org>

<https://www.eurovia.org>

<https://handsontheland.net>





ECVC  
Rue de la Sablonnière 18  
1000 Bruxelles  
Belgium  
[www.eurovia.org](http://www.eurovia.org)



Produced with the financial support from the European Commission.  
The views expressed herein are not those of the EC.



Hand on the Land is for Food Sovereignty is a collective campaign including peasants and social movements, development and environmental NGOs, human rights organizations and research activists aiming to conduct activities in Europe to raise awareness on issues related to the use and governance of land, water, and other natural resources and its effect on the realization of the right to food and Food Sovereignty.