

Access to seed diversity

instead of dependence on genetic engineering corporations

**Acceso a la diversidad de semillas
en lugar de depender de las empresas de ingeniería genética**

**Zugang zu Saatgutvielfalt statt
Abhängigkeit von Gentechnik-Konzernen**

**L'accès à la diversité des semences
au lieu de dépendre des entreprises du génie génétique**



Farmers' Protest Note

Appeal to the International Conference of Ministers of Agriculture

Berlin, 21 January 2023

Access to seed diversity instead of dependence on the seed and biotech industry

Only with the diversity inherent to peasant agriculture can the sustainable transformation of food systems succeed

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In the face of the chronic world food crisis, which continues to worsen drastically, and of the tense situation on farms, we farmers have come to Berlin with our tractors for the now thirteenth time in a row, to attend the "We're fed up" demonstration and the *Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA)*. We farmers are increasingly concerned about our operations and the farms of our colleagues around the world. We look back on the latest year in power of the traffic light coalition with great dissatisfaction. Indeed, the government's record is sobering: too little, too slowly, too many concessions to the agricultural industry and the profiteers of the existing system. That is not what a transformation of food systems looks like!

As recently as last April, just a few weeks after the Russian attack on Ukraine, we called on you, Mr Özdemir, at a joint rally before the Ministry of Agriculture, to think about the crises together and not play them off against each other. But many of our demands were not heard, much to the contrary. It appears that the federal government is actually pursuing exactly the opposite positions. First, in June, protected ecological areas were opened for use. Then the financing of the necessary transition to species- and climate-appropriate animal husbandry was denied and subsidies are still awarded by surface area instead of rewarding ecological services. But it is precisely the efforts of farmers for an agro-ecological transition that are central to the German and European debate on the transformation of the food system. They need clear a clear framework to tackle the transformation.

The same applies to the international level: here, too, the transformation is postponed. For example, international support has not been given to those producers who stand for a regionally adapted sustainable transformation of the food system and for food sovereignty. Instead, the focus of the crisis responses has been to keep markets open and to lower prices for synthetic chemical fertilizers. Thus, on the international level too the approach is 'business as usual' instead of transforming the food system.

Instead of promoting peasant-driven diversity in the fields, we are experiencing a role backwards both nationally and internationally: the myth persists that monocausal increases in production and fatally simplified technical solutions, such as digitalisation or genetic engineering, can create food security. Together with civil society, these false answers are driving us onto the streets.

Once again, this year's GFFA theme "Transforming Food Systems: A Global Response to Multiple Crises" raises great expectations and hopes among us. The title is good, but we have doubts about its implementation. For us, the same applies as in April: **sow peace, end war – the struggle against hunger must be tackled structurally and in the World Food Council CFS.**



We recognise the commitment of the BMEL to this agenda in recent months and also see the structural changes that have been initiated in the BMEL to strengthen the right to food and the CFS. The GFFA itself also seems to be changing. We regard the central inclusion of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food as a milestone, precisely because this step is self-evident and has been overdue for years. It hopefully stands for the dissolution of the decades-long transformation blockades in Germany. But it is also only a first step that must be followed by many more.

We are sceptical because, on the one hand, the traffic light coalition lacks a credible policy towards an agro-ecological turnaround and, on the other hand, it lacks the ambition to implement international resolutions at national and European level. The right to food and the rights of farmers must be the guiding principles of a coherent policy here and worldwide – for the global South as well as for the global North.

Every year that no ambitious action is taken means the loss of even more businesses and the increase of inequality and injustice. Nothing demonstrates the extreme rise in inequality more dramatically than the 828 million people who are chronically hungry. At the same time, the profits of agri-food corporations continue to grow. It is the task of the CFS to formulate answers in the sense of the right to food for overcoming this ever increasing inequality. The UN Special Rapporteur also underlines this need and calls for a global action plan to enforce the right to food. These answers will be uncomfortable for many wealthy states, corporations and people, because it will certainly also have to be about redistribution.

Seeds are commons

For more than 10,000 years, farmers have been selecting, exchanging, storing and selling seeds. In doing so, they have created the diversity that gives us new life every day. This is an essential contribution to ensuring food sovereignty. Seeds are common goods. But colonialism and the industrialization of agriculture have steadily eroded this valuable heritage and further restricted farmers' rights. Through intellectual property rights and patents – not least enforced by trade agreements - corporations gained more and more power over seeds and our food. Many farmers have lost their seed sovereignty and are now dependent on multinational seed companies, which determine which seeds with which characteristics are marketed. These developments are fatal and hamper the realization of the right to food and the overcoming of hunger. At the same time, this dependence leads to uniformity in the fields and thus threatens biodiversity.

To counteract this, halt the loss of agricultural biodiversity, and recognize the immeasurable peasant and indigenous contribution to world food and biodiversity, the international community formulated the peasant and indigenous rights at the end of the 20th and at the beginning of this century and adopted the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its protocols, the International Seed Treaty (ITPGRFA), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the UN Declaration on Peasant Rights (UNDROP).

Rural access to seed diversity must finally be secured and international agreements such as UNDROP must finally be transposed into national law. Without agricultural (seed) diversity, there will be no overcoming hunger.

Strict regulation of genetic engineering instead of increasing dependence on seed and biotech companies

Fighting hunger structurally also means resolutely opposing the wrong solutions to hunger. It is high time, because a strong lobby of some corporations, technical and scientific associations is committed to have new genetic engineering processes exempted from regulation under EU genetic engineering law. These players repeatedly justify the exemption from regulation by claiming that the new genetic engineering processes are needed to fight hunger. This is despite the fact that even the first generation of genetic engineering has not contributed to the fight against hunger, but has forced millions of farmers into dependence on agricultural corporations and into debt. At the same time, production systems have been established that are based on genetically engineered pesticide-tolerant plants and place an extreme burden on biodiversity.

Even now, the new genetic engineering methods do not contribute to combating hunger or the climate and biodiversity crises. Deregulation would result in GMOs entering the seed and food markets without independent risk assessment, traceability and labelling. The consequences and risks would have to be borne by farmers and consumers. Farmers will continue to demand the right to GM-free production of food and consumers the right to GM-free food. A prerequisite for this is the strict regulation of the new genetic techniques according to EU genetic engineering law and the implementation of the precautionary principle of the EU as well as of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This is the only way we can protect ourselves from GMO contamination in seeds, in feed, in our crops and on our plates.

The EU Commission's leaked plans are worrying and seem to follow the motto: profits for corporations – risks for all. Farmers are to be left sitting on the damages. Not with us! We expect a clear stance from the GFFA and from Minister Özdemir to protect freedom from genetic engineering – worldwide!

Time is running out: Minister, act now resolutely for the human right to food and the rights of farmers worldwide!

13 years of protest in Berlin have made one thing clear to us: we need a strong civil society that keeps a close eye on politics.

Farmers worldwide expect the GFFA, chaired by Cem Özdemir, to take decisive action for food sovereignty, human rights and the structural fight against the causes of hunger.

Minister, we hope you will give us more ambition for a socially just agricultural transformation based on the human right to food and the rights of farmers (UNDROP) worldwide.

We therefore call on the Ministers of Agriculture meeting at the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture, and in particular on the German Minister of Agriculture Cem Özdemir, to:

In view of the global food crisis:

1. to finally develop global inclusive responses within the framework of the World Food Committee (CFS) based on the right to food that address the worsening world food, climate and biodiversity crisis.
2. in their swift reaction to the world food crisis, to finally focus the help on the producers who are undergoing an agro-ecological transformation.
3. to support above all measures that serve food sovereignty and the transformation of food systems.
4. to advocate for a global action plan on the right to food based on the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food.
5. to undertake to develop national and multilateral strategies for the implementation of the UNDROP.

With regard to rural seed diversity:

6. to strengthen peasant rights as provided for by the International Seed Treaty (ITPGRFA) and UNDROP by reforming national and regional seed legislation and making UNDROP a central part of the ongoing EU seed reform.
7. to strengthen rural seed work and systems financially too, for example by promoting rural seed banks and training programmes.
8. To reform intellectual property laws on seeds so that peasant and indigenous rights are protected; to prohibit the patenting of seeds globally; and to enforce the right to farm-saved seeds globally.

With regard to genetic engineering:

9. to apply the precautionary principle of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) consistently worldwide. EU genetic engineering legislation must be implemented accordingly. New genetic technologies are also risk technologies and must remain regulated.
10. to discontinue efforts to deregulate products of the new genomic techniques, as is currently being discussed in the EU and in various countries. The right to GM-free livestock breeding, production and nutrition must be safeguarded.
11. to prevent unrecoverable, extensive interferences with natural environments and non-GM seed. The polluter-pays principle must be implemented.