

From Food Crisis to Food Sovereignty

The Challenge of Social Movements

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The current global food crisis—decades in the making—is a crushing indictment against capitalist agriculture and the corporate monopolies that dominate the world’s food systems. The role of the industrial agri-food complex in creating the crisis (through the monopolization of input industries, industrial farming, processing, and retailing) and the self-serving neoliberal solutions proposed by the world’s multilateral institutions and leading industrial countries are being met with skepticism, disillusion, and indifference by a general public more concerned with the global economic downturn than with the food crisis. Neoliberal retrenchment has met growing resistance by those most affected by the crisis—the world’s smallholder farmers.

Solutions to the food crisis advanced by the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), and mega-philanthropy, propose accelerating the spread of biotechnology, reviving the Green Revolution, re-introducing the conditional lending of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and re-centering the now fragmented power of the World Trade Organization (WTO) by concluding the Doha “Development Round” of trade negotiations. These institutions have a mandate from capital to mitigate hunger, diffuse social unrest, and reduce the overall numbers of peasant producers worldwide—without introducing any substantive changes to the structure of the world’s food systems. Their neoliberal strategies are in stark contrast to the proposals for ecological approaches to agriculture (agroecology) and food sovereignty advanced by farmer federations and civil society organizations worldwide that instead seek to transform food systems. Clashes and declarations of protest at recent summits in Rome,

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Hokkaido, and Madrid, the growing public resistance to the industrial agrifood complex, and the rise, spread, and political convergence of movements for agroecology, land reform, food justice, and food sovereignty, all indicate that the food crisis has become the focal point in a class struggle over the future of our food systems.

The Food Crisis

Last year record numbers of the world's poor experienced hunger, this at a time of record harvests and record profits for the world's major agrifood corporations. The contradiction of increasing hunger in the midst of wealth and abundance sparked "food riots," not seen for many decades. Protests in Mexico, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, Indonesia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Yemen, Egypt, Haiti, and twenty other countries were sparked by skyrocketing food prices (see Walden Bello and Mara Baviera's article in this issue). In June 2008, the World Bank reported that global food prices had risen 83 percent over the last three years and the FAO cited a 45 percent increase in their world food price index in just nine months.¹ While commodity prices have since fallen due to the world economic downturn and speculators lessening their bets on commodities, food prices remain high and are not expected to return to pre-crisis levels.

The widespread food protests were not simply crazed "riots" by hungry masses. Rather, they were angry demonstrations against high food prices in countries that formerly had food surpluses, and where government and industry were unresponsive to people's plight. In some cases, starving people were just trying to access food from trucks or stores. Alarmed by the specter of growing social unrest, the World Bank announced that without massive, immediate injections of food aid, 100 million people in the South would join the swelling ranks of the world's hungry.² These shrill warnings immediately revived Malthusian mantras within the agrifood industry and unleashed a flurry of heroic industrial promises for new genetically engineered high-yielding, "climate-ready," and "bio-fortified" seeds. The World Bank called for a "New Deal" for Agriculture and trotted out a portfolio of \$1.2 billion in emergency loans. The FAO appealed (unsuccessfully) to OECD governments to finance a \$30 billion a year revival of developing country agriculture. Über-philanthropist Bill Gates invited multinational corporations to follow him into a new era of "creative capitalism," promising that his new Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) would provide four million poor farmers with new seeds and fertilizers.

But with record grain harvests in 2007, according to the FAO, there was more than enough food in the world to feed everyone in 2008—at least 1.5 times current demand. In fact, over the last twenty years, food production has risen steadily at over 2.0 percent a year, while the rate of population growth has dropped to 1.14 percent a year. Globally, population is not outstripping food supply. Over 90 percent of the world's hungry are simply too poor to buy enough food. High food prices are a problem because nearly three billion people—half of the world's population—are poor and near-poor. Around half of the people in the developing world earn less than two dollars a day. Nearly 20 percent are “extremely poor” earning less than one dollar a day.³ Many of those officially classified as poor are subsistence farmers who have limited access to land and water and cannot compete in global markets.⁴ In addition, the diversion of large quantities of grains and oil crops for the growing industrial feedlots in the emerging economies, as well as the diversion of land and water for “green” agrofuels has put significant pressure on markets for many basic foods.

Unsurprisingly, the food crisis has provided the world's major agri-food monopolies with windfall profits. In the last quarter of 2007 as the world food crisis was breaking, Archer Daniels Midland's earnings jumped 42 percent, Monsanto's by 45 percent, and Cargill's by 86 percent. Cargill's subsidiary, Mosaic Fertilizer, saw profits rise by 1,200 percent.⁵

The steady concentration of profits and market power in the industrial North mirrors the loss of food producing capacity and the growth of hunger in the global South. Despite the oft-cited productivity gains of the Green Revolution, and despite decades of development campaigns—most recently, the elusive Millennium Development Goals—per capita hunger is rising and the number of desperately hungry people on the planet has grown steadily from 700 million in 1986 to 800 million in 1998.⁶ Today, the number stands at over 1 billion. Fifty years ago, the developing countries had yearly agricultural trade surpluses of \$1 billion. After decades of capitalist development and the global expansion of the industrial agri-food complex, the southern food *deficit* has ballooned to \$11 billion a year.⁷ The cereal import bill for low-income food-deficit countries is now over \$38 billion and the FAO predicts it will grow to \$50 billion by 2030.⁸ This shift from food self-sufficiency to food dependency has been accomplished by colonizing national food systems and destroying peasant agriculture.

The Persistence of the Peasantry

The last half-century of capitalist agricultural expansion has pummeled the world's peasantry, dispossessing them of land, water, and genetic resources through violent processes of enclosures, displacement, and outright piracy. The Green Revolution, the World Bank's structural adjustment programs, and global and regional trade agreements have driven differentiation and de-peasantization.⁹ The same period has seen a fourfold increase in grain and oilseed production, with a steady decline in prices to farmers.¹⁰ This has been accompanied by a relentless industrial trend of vertical and horizontal concentration within the world's food systems. Two companies, Archer Daniels Midland and Cargill, capture three-quarters of the world grain trade.¹¹ The top three seed companies Monsanto, Dupont, and Syngenta control 39 percent of the world's commercial seed market.¹²

However, high global rates of urbanization have not overcome the stubborn "persistence of the peasantry."¹³ Whether this is due to the fact that historically new family-labor farms continually replace those lost through industrialization,¹⁴ or because for much of the world's rural poor "there is hardly any alternative but farming," the fact is that despite massive out-migration and intense fractioning of peasant landholdings, the absolute numbers of peasant and smallholder farmers in the South have remained remarkably stable over the last forty years.¹⁵ Smallholders continue to provide significant amounts of the food in the South, as high as 90 percent of all food production in African countries.¹⁶

This mix of de-peasantization and *re-peasantization* has led to shifts in crops, hybridized forms of production, and a heavy reliance on off-farm income and remittances. These processes are characterized by changes in the forms of production, livelihood strategies, and political demands. Reformulating the "peasant question," Araghi (see endnote 9) identifies not only historic demands for land, but also demands relating to the transnational and dispossessed character of today's smallholders, e.g., housing and homelessness, informal work, migration, identity, environment, and increasingly hunger.

The difficulty of confronting the extensive attacks on smallholders and politically mobilizing around the complexity of their livelihood demands has been a challenge for agrarian movements in the South. This has also been a problem for northern organizations seeking to protect family farms and counter the expansion of large-scale industrial agriculture with more sustainable forms of production. Only a decade ago, rural sociologists lamented the lack of an "underlying notion...to serve as a

unifying force” for a sustainable agriculture movement, and pointed to the need for advocates to form coalitions to advance an agro-foods movement capable of contesting deregulation, globalization, and agro-ecosystem degradation.¹⁷ With the current food crisis, the peasant-based call for *food sovereignty*—literally, people’s self-government of the food system—can potentially fulfill this political function.

First defined in 1996 by the international peasant federation La Vía Campesina (The Peasant Way) as “people’s right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems,” food sovereignty proposes that people, rather than corporate monopolies, make the decisions regarding our food. Food sovereignty is a much deeper concept than food security because it proposes not just guaranteed access to food, but democratic control over the food system—from production and processing, to distribution, marketing, and consumption. Whether applied to countries in the global South working to re-establish national food production, to farmers protecting their seed systems from GMOs, or to rural-urban communities setting up their own direct marketing systems, food sovereignty aims to democratize and transform our food systems.

For decades, family farmers, rural women, and communities around the world have resisted the destruction of their native seeds and worked hard to diversify their crops, protect their soil, conserve their water and forests, and establish local gardens, markets, businesses, and community-based food systems. There are many highly productive, equitable, and sustainable alternatives to the present industrial practices and corporate monopolies holding the world’s food hostage, and literally millions of people working to advance these alternatives.¹⁸ Contrary to conventional thinking, these practices are highly productive and could easily feed the projected mid-century global population of over nine billion people.¹⁹

Smallholders working with movements like Campesino a Campesino (Farmer to Farmer) of Latin America, and NGO networks for farmer-led sustainable agriculture like Participatory Land Use Management (PELUM) of Africa, and the Farmer Field Schools of Asia have restored exhausted soils, raised yields, and preserved the environment using highly effective agroecological management practices on hundreds of thousands of acres of land. These practices have given them important measures of autonomy in relation to the industrial agrifood system and have increased their environmental and economic resiliency, buffering them from climate-induced hazards and market volatility.

At the same time, peasant organizations struggling to advance agrarian reform have been busy confronting the neoliberal offensive.²⁰ Because the expansion of industrial agrifood both dispossesses smallholders and recruits them into a massive reserve army of labor, these peasant organizations have broadened their work across sectors and borders. The globalization of these movements—both in content and scale—responds in part to the intensification of capital's enclosures, and is partly a strategic decision to engage in global advocacy. As a result, the new transnational agrarian movements regularly integrate social, environmental, economic, and cultural concerns with demands for land reform.

Two distinguishable currents can be identified from these trends. One is made up of peasant organizations and federations focusing primarily on new agrarian advocacy—like *Vía Campesina*. The other trend is made up of smallholders working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus primarily on developing sustainable agriculture—like *Campesino a Campesino*. The political and institutional origins of these currents are different, and this has at times led to contradictory, competitive and even adversarial relations, particularly between non-governmental organizations implementing programs in the interests of farmers, and farmer's organizations interested in implementing their own programs. Nonetheless, at both the farm and the international level, there is clear objective synergy between the agrarian demands of today's peasant organizations, and the needs of the growing base of smallholders practicing sustainable agriculture as a means of survival. The food crisis may be bringing these movements together.

Advocacy: Walking on the Peasant Road

In 1993 farm leaders from around the world gathered in Mons, Belgium for a conference on policy research put on by a Dutch NGO allied with the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), an international farm federation dominated by large-scale, northern farmers. What emerged instead was an international peasant movement: *La Vía Campesina*. The emergence of an international *peasant-led* farmer federation signified both a break with conventional federations run by large producers and with the humanitarian NGOs typically concerned with peasant agricultural production. The Mons declaration asserted the right of small farmers to make a living in the countryside, the right of all people to healthy food, and the right of nations to define their own agricultural polices.²¹

Since its inception, *Vía Campesina's* main objective has been to halt neoliberalism and construct alternative food systems based on food sov-

ereignty. It was formed with organizations mostly from the Americas and Europe, but has since expanded to include more than 150 rural social movements from over 79 countries, including 12 countries in Africa, and scores of organizations in South and East Asia. Unlike its large farmer counterpart IFAP, Vía Campesina is made up almost entirely of marginalized groups: landless workers, small farmers, sharecroppers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, and the peri-urban poor.

Vía Campesina has been remarkably successful in creating the political space in which to advance its platform of food sovereignty, getting the WTO out of agriculture, women's rights, sustainable agriculture, a ban on GMO's, and redistributive agrarian reform. The movement was instrumental in organizing protests at WTO ministerial meetings from Seattle to Hong Kong. Vía Campesina played the lead role in the FAO International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in 2006, and mounted successful resistance campaigns to the World Bank's market-led land reform programs.

Vía Campesina has also been among the most vocal critics of institutional responses to the global food crisis. At the High Level Task force meeting on the food crisis in Madrid, Spain, Vía Campesina released a declaration demanding that solutions to the food crisis be completely independent of the institutions responsible for creating the crisis in the first place (i.e., the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and CGIAR). The declaration reaffirmed the call for food sovereignty, demanded an end to land grabs for industrial agrofuel and foreign food production, and called on the international community to reject the Green Revolution and instead support the findings of the UN's International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD). This seminal assessment, sponsored by five UN agencies and the World Bank, and authored by over four hundred scientists and development experts from more than eighty countries, concluded that there is an urgent need to increase and strengthen further research and adoption of locally appropriate and democratically controlled agroecological methods of production, relying on local expertise, local germplasm, and farmer-managed, local seed systems.

Practice: Agroecological Transformation—Farmer to Farmer

Farmers helping their brothers, so that they can help themselves...to find solutions and not be dependent on a technician or on the bank: that is Campesino a Campesino.

—Argelio González, Santa Lucía, Nicaragua, 1991

This is the farmer's definition of Latin America's thirty-year farmer-led movement for sustainable agriculture. El Movimiento Campesino a Campesino, the Farmer to Farmer Movement, is made up of hundreds of thousands of peasant-technicians farming and working in over a dozen countries.

Campesino a Campesino began with a series of rural projects among the indigenous smallholders of the ecologically fragile hillsides of the Guatemalan Highlands in the early 1970s. Sponsored by progressive NGOs, Mayan peasants developed a method for agricultural improvement using relatively simple methods of small-scale experimentation combined with farmer-led workshops to share their discoveries. Because they were producing at relatively low levels, they concentrated on overcoming the most commonly limiting factors of production in peasant agriculture, i.e., soil and water. By adding organic matter to soils, and by implementing soil and water conservation techniques, they frequently obtained yield increases of 100-400 percent. Rapid, recognizable results helped build enthusiasm among farmers and led to the realization that they could improve their own agriculture—without running the risks, causing the environmental damage, or developing the financial dependency associated with the Green Revolution. Initial methods of composting, soil and water conservation, and seed selection soon developed into a sophisticated “basket” of sustainable technologies and agroecological management approaches that included green manures, crop diversification, integrated pest management, biological weed control, reforestation, and agrobiodiversity management at farm and watershed scales.

The effective, low-cost methods for farmer-generated technologies and farmer-to-farmer knowledge transfer were quickly picked up by NGOs working in agricultural development. The failures of the Green Revolution to improve smallholder livelihoods in Central America, and the region's revolutionary uprisings and counterrevolutionary conflicts of the 1970s and '80s combined to create both the need and the means for the growth of what became the Campesino a Campesino movement. As credit, seeds, extension services, and markets continually failed the peasantry, smallholders turned to NGOs rather than governments to meet their agricultural needs. The structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and '90s exacerbated the conditions of the peasantry. In response, the Campesino a Campesino movement grew, spreading through NGOs to hundreds of thousands of smallholders across the Americas.²² Though the movement was routinely dismissed by the international agricultural research centers for “lacking science” and making unverified claims of

sustainability, in Central America following Hurricane Mitch (1998), some 2,000 *promotores* from Campesino a Campesino carried out scientific research to prove that their farms were significantly more resilient and sustainable than those of their conventional neighbors.²³

One of Campesino a Campesino most dramatic success stories has been in Cuba, where its farmer-driven agroecological practices helped the country transform much of its agriculture from high-external input, large-scale systems to smaller, low-input organic systems. This conversion was instrumental in helping Cuba overcome its food crisis during the Special Period following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Cuban Campesino a Campesino Agroecology Movement (MACAC) was implemented through ANAP, the national association of small farmers. The MACAC grew in a structural environment in which Cuba's numerous agricultural research stations and agricultural universities worked to develop bio-fertilizers, integrated pest management, and other techniques for low external-input agriculture. Reforms were enacted to scale down collectives and cooperatives, placing greater control over farming and marketing directly into the hands of smallholders. Rural and urban farmers were provided easy access to land, credit, and markets.²⁴ In eight years, the Campesino a Campesino movement of Cuba grew to over 100,000 smallholders. It had taken the movement nearly twenty years in Mexico and Central America to grow to that size.²⁵

The farmer-to-farmer approach has been fairly universalized among NGOs working in agroecological development, leading to highly successful farmer-generated agroecological practices worldwide (as well as a fair amount of methodological co-optation on the part of international agricultural research centers). The System of Rice Intensification (SRI) developed in Madagascar has raised yields to as high as eight metric tons per hectare and spread to a million farmers in over two dozen countries.²⁶ A survey of forty-five sustainable agriculture projects in seventeen African countries covering some 730,000 households revealed that agroecological approaches substantially improved food production and household food security. In 95 percent of these projects, cereal yields improved by 50-100 percent.²⁷ A study of organic agriculture on the continent showed that small-scale, modern, organic agriculture was widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, contributing significantly to improved yields, incomes, and environmental services.²⁸ Over 170 African organizations from nine countries in East and Southern Africa belong to the Participatory Land Use Management (PELUM) a network that has been sharing agroecological knowledge in East and South Africa for thirteen years. For twenty years,

the Center for Low External Input Sustainable Agriculture (LEISA) has documented hundreds of agroecological alternatives that successfully overcome many of the limiting factors in African agriculture and elsewhere in the global South (<http://www.leisa.info/>).

The Divide between Practitioners and Advocates

I think we should not fall in the trap of seeing the development of agroecology by just looking at the physical aspects of the farm or just at the economics. We as NGOs have a problem with our social position in which we are serving as a dike and often an obstacle to processes of agency within the people and greater local organization....Agroecology is not just a collection of practices. Agroecology is a way of life...We can't have an agroecological change without a campesino movement. We NGOs can accompany them, but we can't do it. We promote projects, and projects have a short life. They are unsustainable.

—Nelda Sánchez, Mesoamerican Information System for Sustainable Agriculture

Though the farmer-to-farmer-NGO partnership has been highly effective in supporting local projects and developing sustainable practices on the ground, unlike *Vía Campesina*, it has done little to address the need for an enabling policy context for sustainable agriculture. Given the unfavorable structural conditions, agroecological practices have not scaled up nationally to become the rule rather the exception.²⁹ Despite far-flung farmer-to-farmer networks linked by hundreds of NGOs, farmers in these movements have generally not lobbied, pressured, taken direct action, or otherwise organized in favor of sustainable agriculture in a significant way. The farmers of PELUM in West Africa excel in agroecological farming but until recently were largely uninvolved in policy work to halt the spread of the new internationally funded Green Revolution. The renowned Farmer Field Schools of Asia have revolutionized integrated pest management and pioneered participatory plant breeding, but have not been a political force in preserving agrobiodiversity or defending farmer's rights.

Ironically, the strength of these farmer-to-farmer networks—i.e., their capacity to generate farmer's agroecological knowledge in a horizontal, widespread, and decentralized fashion—is also a political weakness. On one hand, there are no coordinating bodies within these networks capable of mobilizing farmers for social pressure, advocacy, or political action. On the other, their effectiveness at developing sustainable agriculture at the local level has kept its promoters focused on improving agroecologi-

cal practices rather than addressing the political and economic *conditions* for sustainable agriculture.

While the potential synergies between a global peasant federation advocating food sovereignty and far-flung smallholder movements practicing agroecology may seem obvious, efforts to bring agrarian advocacy to farmer-to-farmer networks have run up against the historical distrust between development NGOs implementing sustainable agriculture projects and the peasant organizations that make up the new agrarian movements. Aside from having assumed many of the tasks previously expected of the state, NGOs have become an institutional means to advance social and political agendas within the disputed political terrain of civil society. Within the institutional landscape of agricultural development some NGOs are enrolled either directly or indirectly in the neoliberal project. Others are simply doing what they do best and tend to look out for their own programs. But others are deeply concerned that advancing the practices of sustainable agriculture without addressing the conditions for sustainability will ultimately end in failure. These NGOs are potential links to vast informal networks of smallholders who are committed to transforming agriculture.

Over the last thirty years the farmers in these networks have demonstrated their capacity to share information and knowledge. Their commitment to agroecological practices has resulted in a body of agrarian demands specific to sustainable peasant agriculture. It is now common among these farmers to hear the term food sovereignty. However, because most of these farmers do not belong to the farmer organizations that make up *Vía Campesina*, there are few, if any, avenues for them to exercise this commitment politically.

Integrating Advocacy and Practice: Brazil's Landless Workers Movement

One example of the potential transformational power of integrating peasant advocacy with agroecological practice comes from a peasant movement that is actively integrating these two aspects into its own organization. Brazil's Landless Worker's Movement (MST), one of *Vía Campesina's* founding members, is the largest rural social movement in the Americas. The MST has had a significant influence within *Vía Campesina* and a profound effect on agrarian politics worldwide. The MST has settled more than a million landless peasants and forced the redistribution of thirty-five million acres of land (an area the size of Uruguay).

The MST has its roots in peasant land occupations dating back to the late 1970s. In December 1979 a group of landless rural workers set up a camp at a crossroads now known as Encruzilhada Natalino. Following a clause in the Brazilian constitution mandating that land serve a social function, the peasants demanded that the government redistribute idle land in the area. Three and a half years and many mass mobilizations later, the group was granted around 4,600 acres. Building on the success of Encruzilhada Natalino and several others like it, land occupations have been the primary tactic of the MST.³⁰

Delegates from land occupations throughout Brazil met in 1984 in the state of Paraná and laid out four basic goals for the future of the movement: “a) to maintain a broadly inclusive movement of the rural poor in order; b) to achieve agrarian reform; c) to promote the principle that land belongs to the people who work on it and live from it; and d) make it possible to have a just, fraternal society and put an end to capitalism.”³¹ Since then the movement has established some 400 production associations, 1,800 elementary schools, adult literacy programs, credit co-ops, health clinics, and its own organic seed supplier for MST farmers.³²

Though the MST initially promoted industrial agriculture among its members, this strategy proved unsustainable and economically disastrous on many of its settlements. In 1990 the movement reached out to other peasant movements practicing agroecology, and at its fourth national congress in 2000, the MST adopted agroecology as national policy to orient production on its settlements. Today, the seven organizations that participate in La Vía Campesina-Brasil have all adopted agroecology as an official policy, as have many organizations in Vía Campesina-International. The MST and La Vía Campesina-Brasil have established eleven secondary schools and introduced university courses in agroecology to train the movements’ youth to provide technical assistance to campesino families in rural areas. The integration of agroecology into the new agrarian movements is a welcome development because it helps advance forms of production that are consistent with the political and social goals of food sovereignty, and the MST schools in and of themselves are a testament to the movements’ capacity to advance agroecological policies at state and federal levels.³³

Cultivating Convergence

The global food crisis had reinforced neoliberal retrenchment in agricultural development and breathed new life into the sagging Green Revolution, now resurgent in Africa and parts of Asia. Like its predeces-

sor, the new Green Revolution is essentially a *campaign* designed to mobilize resources for the expansion of capitalist agriculture. Similar to the role once played by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations (albeit on a much smaller scale), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is the new philanthropic flagship for the Green Revolution tasked with resurrecting the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and obtaining broad social and government agreement for the expansion of agro-industrial capital into peasant communities. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa serves up shallow definitions of terms like agroecology, sustainability, and even food sovereignty in an effort to strip them of their deeper, agrarian content and enroll NGOs and their stakeholders into the Green Revolution.

The food crisis is bad, but another Green Revolution will make things much worse. The alternative, smallholder-driven agroecological agriculture, was recognized by the IAASTD as the best strategy for rebuilding agriculture, ending rural poverty and hunger, and establishing food security in the South. To be given a chance, however, this strategy requires a combination of strong political will *and* extensive on-the-ground agroecological practice to overcome opposition from the well-financed Green Revolution.

In the face of a renewed, neoliberal assault in the form of a Green Revolution, peasant movements and farmer-to-farmer networks do appear to be moving closer together. When PELUM brought over three hundred farmer leaders together in Johannesburg to speak on their own behalf at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Eastern and Southern Africa Farmers Forum was founded. African farm organizations and their allies have met in Mali, Bonn, and Senegal to advance African Agroecological Alternatives to the Green Revolution (2007, 2008). Following the Rome food crisis meeting, *Vía Campesina* met in Mozambique where they signed a declaration for a smallholder solution to the food crisis (2008). These developments and others suggest that the international call for food sovereignty is beginning to take root in specific smallholder initiatives to confront the food and farm crisis. New mixes of advocacy and practice across borders and sectors and between institutions are being forged on a daily basis.

These hopeful developments have the potential for bringing together the extensive local networks for agroecological practice with the transnational advocacy organizations. If the two currents merge into a broad-based movement capable of generating massive social pressure, they could tip the scales of political will in favor of food sovereignty.

Ultimately, to end world hunger, the monopolistic industrial agri-food complex will have to be replaced with agroecological and redistributive food systems. It is too early to tell whether or not the fledgling trend of convergence signals a new stage of integration between the main currents of peasant advocacy and smallholder agroecological practice. Nonetheless, the seeds of convergence have been sown. Successfully cultivating this trend may well determine the outcome of both the global food crisis and the international showdown over the world's food systems.

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Technical progress in agriculture, far from making up for this loss [of soil nutrients], is, in essence, a method for improving the techniques of wringing the goodness out of the soil and increasing the mass of nutritional material removed each year for despatch to the towns....That the soil is being exhausted is beyond dispute. Without supplementary fertilizers, and given the current relationship between town and country, and current techniques of production, this would soon lead to the complete collapse of agriculture. Such fertilizers allow the reduction in soil fertility to be avoided, but the necessity of using them in larger and larger amounts simply adds a further burden to agriculture—not one unavoidably imposed by nature, but a direct result of current social organization.

—Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question* (1899), vol. 2, pp. 214-15.