



“Food Connects Us All”

Grassroots Voices from North America on the Importance of Building Agroecology, Fighting for Policy, and Joining Global Struggles



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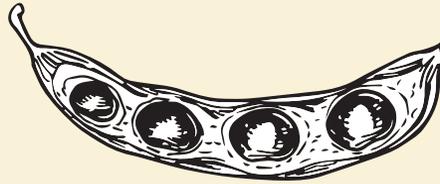
Introduction: The Global Struggle for Agroecology

“International solidarity is so key to the agrarian struggle in the 21st Century. It’s practically a prerequisite.”

— Blain Snipstal, Farmer and Builder, and a Member of the Black Dirt Farm Collective and Earth-Bound Building

As the world grapples with global crises like COVID-19 and the climate emergency, it is becoming increasingly apparent that we need to ensure a “just transition” to a sustainable and ecological economy. This is particularly true for food and agriculture. Industrial agriculture is not only a major contributor to climate change and to the spread of pandemic disease, but it is also worsening hunger, poverty, and global inequality as agribusiness corporations make larger and larger profits while hunger increases, farmers go out of business, and workers face increasingly dire conditions. We need sustainable agriculture that produces healthy food and provides good jobs for everyone.

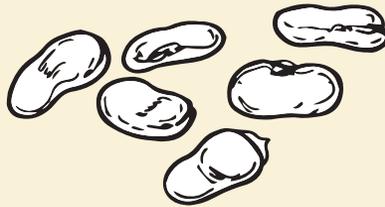




However, agribusiness corporations – pesticide, herbicide, and fertilizer companies; food and farm machinery and technology companies; seed companies; grain, meat, dairy, and egg processing companies; and large-scale fruit and vegetable producers and retailers, among others, which prioritize profits and are increasing their control over the food and agriculture system – are using their political power to undermine democracy and block policies that could address the root causes of these problems. Their strategy is to control debate and discussion about political issues – as well as the “political space” where these debates and discussions are held – to ensure that the voices of the communities most impacted are never heard.

Social movements are organizations of farmers, indigenous people, landless workers, fisherfolk, and others that are based in and led by communities themselves, instead of by professionals or non-governmental organizations (NGOS). Social movements for food sovereignty and agroecology have fought for recognition at the United Nations (UN) and other institutions at the global level where policies are made. Because of the efforts of social movements, grassroots leaders from around the world can raise their voices, challenge their governments, and build support for a new mode of agriculture that is based on the human rights of people and the good of the planet.

Social movements have organized together for a decade to demand more representation and to be more involved in developing global policy, and when the world faced a food price crisis in 2007, they were able to create a remarkable political achievement. The UN announced that it would reform the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) so that:

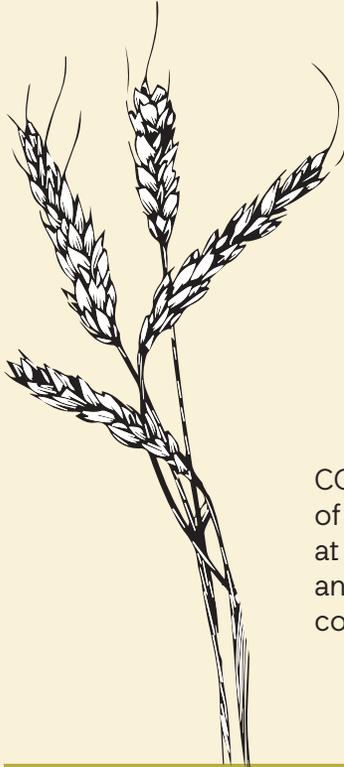


- Social movements have an equal voice with governments during negotiations and debates (instead of being limited to a 2-minute speech as in most other UN policy spaces);
- Human rights, and especially the human right to food, should be the basis for global food and agriculture policy; and
- Workers, farmers, and communities most at risk of hunger – the “holders” of the right to food – should be at the center of policymaking.

Since then, social movements have used the CFS to advance important policies on a range of issues, from land rights to nutrition to the fight for global recognition of and support for agroecology.

This publication brings together the voices of four leaders in the US agroecology and food sovereignty movement who have participated in the process of fighting for democratic political spaces where social movements could advance agroecology. For these leaders, joining the global struggle has made them better organizers and leaders in their own communities and strengthened their work. Instead of taking away their capacity, international experience and work deepened their analysis, opened their eyes to the global struggle, allowed them to see the impact of US policies on a global scale, and connected their own struggle with others. Their work in their local communities led them to the global stage, where they connected to global social movements and gained a new perspective that strengthened their local struggles as part of the global struggle. As the members of the global peasant movement La Via Campesina say, “*Globalize the Struggle, Globalize Hope.*”

COVID-19: A Wake-Up Call to Action



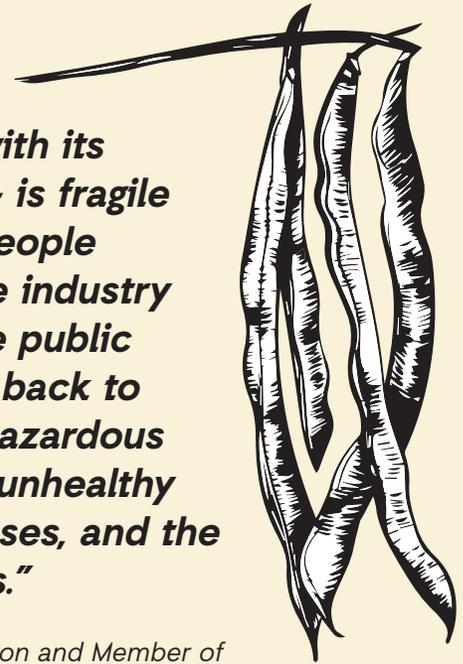
“COVID has shown us how fragile the corporate, industrial agriculture model is. The curtain has been pulled back on our food system, and the extent of the fragility of the industrial model.”

— Jordan Treakle, Policy Coordinator for the National Family Farm Coalition

COVID-19 was a wake-up to the world that the food system is facing a lethal combination of food, climate, and public health crises that are creating inequality and injustice at an alarming rate. However, these crises are not accidental; they are symptoms of an unsustainable and destructive global system of agriculture that is dominated by corporations.

“We are seeing that our whole food system – with its inflexible, corporate-controlled supply chains – is fragile and vulnerable, which leaves more and more people vulnerable as well. Yet, the food and agriculture industry response has been to strengthen its grip on the public narrative and assure us that everything will get back to normal. But ‘normal’ means a continuation of hazardous working conditions for food and farm workers, unhealthy processed foods that lead to diet-related illnesses, and the likelihood of future emerging zoonotic diseases.”

— Patti Naylor, Iowa Farmer, member of the National Family Farm Coalition and Member of the Civil Society Mechanism for the UN Committee on World Food Security



The crisis caused by the pandemic confirmed that the corporate food system is fragile and will crumble under pressure. Its global supply chains that are based on corporate timelines break instead of adapting to sudden change. On the other hand, the localized, sustainable “food webs” of family farmers are resilient and can withstand shocks.



“COVID has essentially brought large-scale agriculture to its knees here in the US, but almost every farmer that I know has increased their food production to meet their new local market demand and also to meet their social demand. Most of them have actually done well financially for the year, and as a result, they have begun to donate more produce or create more cost share programs for low-income families and things like that. For farmers, that’s a big deal.”

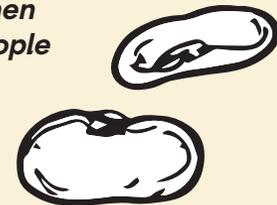
— Blain Snipstal

The pandemic showed that big, transformative change is needed. It is not a coincidence that in the United States, the year 2020 saw the largest mass protests ever, with millions of people fighting for social and racial justice, indigenous rights, climate justice, and workers’ rights.

“Right now, we see this collision of climate change, state violence and police violence, and economic inequality that COVID has just exacerbated. COVID blew the veil off any society that had major inequities in any part of the world. No society has been saved from it.”

“Social change happens when a majority of people are uncomfortable and then get organized. Consciousness on a societal level raises as the majority of people are uncomfortable.”

— Blain Snipstal



The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the world that transforming our food systems – making them sustainable, equitable, resilient, and fair – is essential.

“Food connects us all. Our food production and our agriculture are often overlooked, but if we don’t address our food, our agricultural systems, we can’t really address racial disparities, climate change, environmental destruction.”

— Patti Naylor



Agroecology: the Solution for Workers, Farmers, and the Planet



“Agroecology is resistance. We’re working against the current, industrial, corporate-dominated agriculture system. But it’s more than just resistance. It’s also a pathway to a better society, a society that’s more just and that recognizes the value of our food, the way we grow that food, and our connection to nature.”

— Patti Naylor, Iowa Farmer, member of the National Family Farm Coalition and Member of the Civil Society Mechanism for the UN Committee on World Food Security

Agroecology is a way to produce food based in ecological principles that center the needs, values, and rights of people and communities who produce and rely on food. Agroecology relies on traditional and indigenous knowledge – not harmful chemicals – and it is opposed to the model of corporate agribusiness.



Photo courtesy of National Family Farm Coalition

“Agroecology gives a roadmap for working towards food sovereignty.”

“The thing that differentiates agroecology is that it is explicitly coming from the social movements. I very much frame my understanding of agroecology in La Via Campesina’s definition of seeing agroecology as a practice, a science, and a movement.”

“I don’t think that the goal should be a strict definition because ecology is not a one-size-fits-all. It explicitly cannot be applicable to some kinds of operations, like industrial agriculture.”

— Jordan Treacle



What is Agroecology?

“Agroecology is a way of life of our peoples, in harmony with the language of Nature. It is a paradigm shift in the social, political, productive, and economic relations in our territories, to transform the way we produce and consume food and to restore a socio-cultural reality devastated by industrial food production. Agroecology generates local knowledge, builds social justice, promotes identity and culture and strengthens the economic viability of rural and urban areas.”

— Civil Society Organizations (CSO) final Declaration at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology

Agroecology is a science, a practice, and a movement to transform food production and food systems. Agroecology is a way for family farmers and food workers to produce food sustainably that goes beyond “organic,” “sustainable,” or “regenerative” agriculture. Agroecology does not use chemical fertilizers and pesticides but instead farms with nature and relies on natural synergies and interactions on the farm to prevent pests and produce healthy food. It is based in the science of ecology as well as the traditional and indigenous knowledges of farmers and rural peoples.

Agroecology also builds a society that is more socially, economically, and environmentally just. A food system based in agroecology would mean that all people have a right to healthy, culturally appropriate food, and that the important work of producing food – which often is the responsibility of women, youth, and people of color – is valued and respected. Agroecology is based in grassroots organizations and peoples’ movements. Agroecology requires food sovereignty, as well as democracy and human rights.



Photo courtesy of Patti Naylor

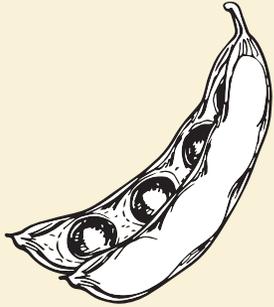
The movement for agroecology is both a response – a rejection of an unjust and unsustainable food system that oppresses and disenfranchises – as well as a vision – a pathway to an equitable society that works with nature and allows communities to flourish.

“The power of agroecology is that it brings a political analysis together with a social movement to show that it’s not just about the way we produce our food, it’s the way we relate to each other, and it’s the way we relate to nature.”

— Patti Naylor

Patti Naylor grows organic corn, soybeans, oats, hay, and cider apples and raises chickens with her husband, George. She is a leader in Family Farm Defenders (www.familyfarmdefenders.org) and the National Family Farm Coalition (www.nffc.net). She is also the focal point for North American civil society organizations within the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM, www.csm4cfs.org) for the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS). She writes at www.clarityonparity.com.

Agroecology is important now because the crises of COVID, hunger, climate change, and injustice are interconnected and getting worse. The capitalist economic system is destroying our ability to feed ourselves and protect our natural resources. Agribusiness corporations financialize, commodify, control, and grab natural resources from the people. They cause hunger and poverty and destroy the planet. Agroecology is the alternative, with a different bottom line.



“Agroecology is not “market-based.” Farmers need to be paid for what they do, but this goes far beyond any idea of profit. Agroecology takes that market-based idea out of the main narrative of agriculture, of food production, and it replaces it with something more important, which is our connections to people and to nature.”

“Corporations are pushing a problematic ‘solution’ to the climate crisis. ‘Carbon markets’ are supposed to pay farmers for their ‘ecological services,’ but they will only benefit farmers who can afford to buy the technology needed to measure and track their soil data. And what they are doing is not anything like what I would consider ‘regenerative.’ It still relies on pesticides. It’s based on technology. The technology that the corporations are pushing on us farmers takes the human element out of farming, and it takes humans out of nature.”

— Patti Naylor

Agroecology is not just about sustainable agriculture; it is also about social justice and liberation. The movement for Agroecology is firmly grounded in and belongs to the indigenous and traditional peoples’ ongoing resistance to colonialism and White Supremacy. In the United States, Black farmers developed the term “Afroecology” to articulate that agroecology is not just about farming techniques. It is about the social, economic, and political struggles of people connected to the land.



Photo courtesy of Blain Snipstal

“One thing that I had learned early on from traveling abroad was that agricultural production, or Agroecology production, is not enough to transform society...So much of our struggle, particularly here in the US, and within the agrarian context, is to win the battle of ideas.”

“Afroecology came from...this synthesis, this collision, between the Black agrarian experience that I’ve been grounded in and a part of, in addition to this call for a mass-based movement around agroecology. We said, ‘we’re going to couch this in our cultural experience in a way that speaks directly to us...to understand the agrarian legacy from which we come...and revalorize black folks’ relationship to Mother Earth, to toiling on the land, and to find pride in it.”

— Blain Snipstal

Black farmers in the United States must contend with ongoing systemic and structural racism, but they must also fight against a food and farming system that is controlled by agribusiness. That means that Black farmers need to build power, and one way that they have historically done that is through cultural ties and solidarity.

Blain Snipstal is a member of the Black Dirt Farm Collective (www.facebook.com/blackdirtfarmcollective) and a founder of Earth-Bound Building (www.earthboundbuilding.com), a worker-owned construction cooperative. He has served as a youth representative of SAAFON, the Rural Coalition, and La Via Campesina and has

participated in many global social movement convenings.



Photo courtesy of Jahi Chappell

“Afroecology is about incorporating African-American knowledge into agroecology and giving it the recognition that a lot of other indigenous knowledges have been given. Afroecology really appeals to our farmers...it’s about change and respect and sustainability.”

“Organic certification is something that Black farmers haven’t had enough access to or support for, but organic certification is neither necessary nor sufficient for Black farmers to thrive. We use Black community ties and wisdom and culture to create what we can to thrive and build power in black communities.”

— Jahi Chappell, Agroecologist and Executive Director of the Southeastern African-American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON)

M. Jahi Chappell is the Executive Director of the Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON, www.saaafon.org). He is an activist, researcher, organizer, son of social workers, and grandson of farmers. He has researched food sovereignty, agroecology, and farming and food security policy in the United States and Brazil and has worked to build participatory, socially just, and ecologically sustainable agrifood systems that center the voices and needs of farmers and eaters rather than corporations and capital. Jahi previously served as the Executive Director of the 45-year-old think tank Food First and was Senior Scientist and Director of Agroecology and

Agricultural Policy at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

From Mali to Maryland and the Mid-West: Deepening Understanding of Agroecology and Building International Solidarity

“I couldn’t have done what I’m doing now if I hadn’t been exposed to the international level.”

— Blain Snipstal, Farmer and Builder, and a Member of the Black Dirt Farm Collective and Earth-Bound Building

Participation at international social movement gatherings and spaces has been critical to the development of many North American farm leaders. They have learned from successful initiatives, agroecology gatherings, and food sovereignty movements in Brazil, Cuba, Mali, Senegal, and other places and brought back new ideas about agroecology and food sovereignty and a broader perspective that allows them to see their situation more clearly. Some have forged strong relationships and collaborations with those they met at international movement gatherings. And through participation in global policy spaces that social movements like La Via Campesina have fought for and which are grounded in human rights, they have seen how grassroots organizations can authentically make demands of their governments and win.





“SAAFON has done exchanges in the Caribbean and in Cuba and has been in spaces with La Via Campesina, so the youth and a number of our farmers are already deeply committed and familiar with agroecology and food sovereignty.”

“Our farmers have been excited when they’re exposed to, and able to see that you’re part of, a larger movement, that you’re not alone, that people are saying things that already make sense to you and speak to your values. I think it is very empowering, and it gives you even more momentum to organize within yourself when you see it’s possible.”

— Jahi Chappell



What is Food Sovereignty?

“Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”

— Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007

Food Sovereignty is the idea that food is a human right and that people, not corporations, should be able to control and make basic decisions about our food systems. Food Sovereignty says that the people who produce food and rely on the land – farmers, landless workers, fishers, indigenous peoples – as well as people impacted by hunger and poverty, should be the ones deciding how our food is grown, what kinds of foods are produced, how food producers are treated, and how food is distributed and accessed.

La Via Campesina, the global peasant movement, first launched the idea of Food Sovereignty at the World Food Summit in 1996, where corporations and governments were talking about “food security.” La Via Campesina insisted that without giving power to the billions of people producing food and caring for the land, hunger would never be ended. They said, *“There can be profit for a few or food for all.”*

Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty (adapted from the 2007 Declaration of Nyéléni):

- Food for people
- values from providers
- localizes food systems
- puts control locally
- builds knowledge and skill
- works with nature

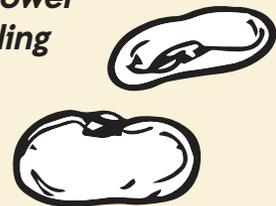
The International Forum on Agroecology at Nyéléni, Mali was an important moment for the global movement for agroecology. Held in 2015, it was a large gathering organized by community-based social movements of farmers, fishers, workers, and indigenous people from around the world to discuss how to strengthen movements, how to spread agroecology on the ground, and how to fight for global agroecology policy at the UN.



“Had we not been exposed to international agroecology encounters and the agroecology process and movement that had been burgeoning out of Central America, or Latin America, and Southeast Asia and Africa, I’m not so sure we would have hosted the first international agroecology encounter in the US in 2015. Without those international experiences through La Via Campesina, it would have been almost improbable to think that that event would have happened at that time.”

“Seeing the experiences of folks in Thailand or Brazil or in Mali, Puerto Rico, Mexico – to get grounded in their perspective, and then to understand how they develop their analysis of those systems of power – was so key in informing my political perspective and understanding here in the US.”

— Blain Snipstal





The International Forum on Agroecology

The International Forum on Agroecology, held at the Nyéléni Centre in Mali in 2015, was a gathering of several hundred agroecology and food sovereignty movement leaders and practitioners from around the world. It was the first major international gathering on agroecology and a key space for social movements to strategize. It was critical for organizing global efforts to advance agroecology policy at the UN CFS, and it was also very important for regional and national processes and for the development of organizations and individuals that participated.

The Forum's objectives and methodologies show the vitality and power of the global movement for agroecology and food sovereignty:

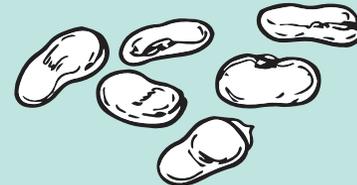
Our Goals:

- Share our knowledge, practices, and experiences of agroecological food production.
- Collectively deepen our understanding of agroecology, its pillars, and its context.
- Build political, organizational, and economic strategies for scaling up agroecology.
- Strengthen our capacity to work together across sectors, continents, generations, and genders.

The Declaration of the International Forum on Agroecology also clearly articulated the context we are facing and why agroecology is essential:

“We see agroecology as a key form of resistance to an economic system that puts profit before life. The corporate model over-produces food that poisons us, destroys soil fertility, is responsible for the deforestation of rural areas, the contamination of water and the acidification of oceans and killing of fisheries. Essential natural resources have been commodified, and rising production costs are driving us off the land. Farmers’ seeds are being stolen and sold back to us at exorbitant prices, bred as varieties that depend on costly, contaminating agrochemicals. The industrial food system is a key driver of the multiple crises of climate, food, environmental, public health, and others. Free trade and corporate investment agreements, Investor-State Dispute Settlement agreements, and false solutions such as carbon markets, and the growing financialization of land and food, etc., all further aggravate these crises. Agroecology within a Food Sovereignty framework offers us a collective path forward from these crises.”

— Declaration of the International Forum on Agroecology, 2015



By getting a deeper understanding of what agroecology and food sovereignty mean from participating in international movement gatherings, we also get a window through which to see more clearly our communities back home.

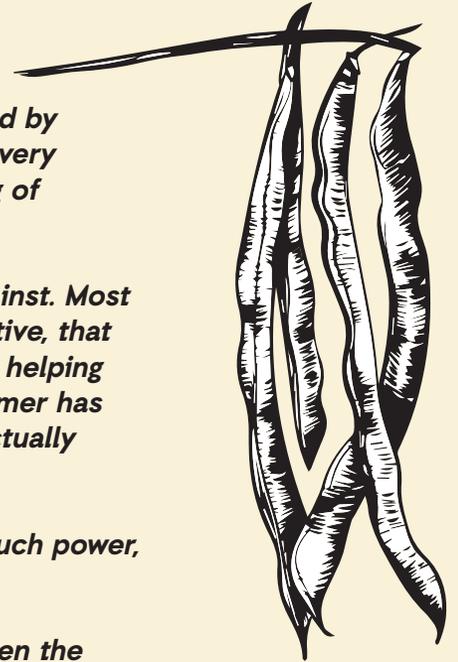
“Five years ago, I went to Cuba to the agroecology course there [hosted by the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP)] and that was really very eye-opening for me. That was really the beginning of my understanding of agroecology.”

“Through the lens of agroecology, we can see what we’re struggling against. Most farmers here in the United States hear the propaganda, hear the narrative, that the farmer is independent, the free market and international trade are helping them, and that they are feeding the world. The narrative is that the farmer has choices, but they really don’t. There’s very little choice in what they actually grow.”

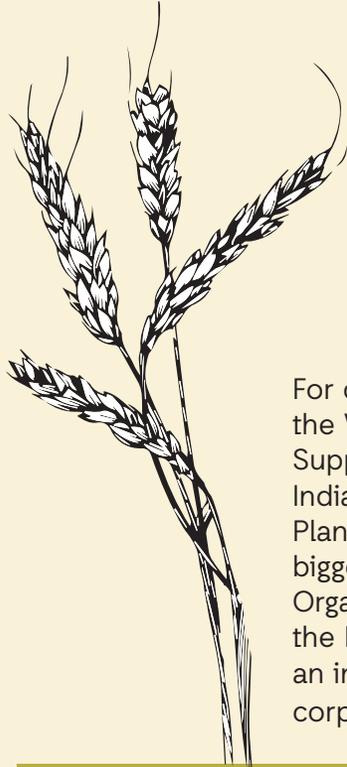
“Multinational corporations have such power, trade agreements have such power, to dictate what the farmer does.

“If we could get the farmers to understand that we’re all connected, then the idea of food sovereignty would make more sense. We can’t truly have food sovereignty unless the whole world has food sovereignty.”

— Patti Naylor



From Rome to Home: The Importance of Global Policy and Why Movements Are Fighting for Space at the United Nations



“La Via Campesina, the grassroots movement representing millions of peasants and family farmers around the world, worked tirelessly to reform the United Nations’ Committee on World Food Security to ensure that the voices of civil society have equal standing as governments and other actors. The CFS is our space.”

— Patti Naylor, Iowa Farmer, member of the National Family Farm Coalition and Member of the Civil Society Mechanism for the UN Committee on World Food Security

For decades, some of the biggest rural social movements – like La Via Campesina (LVC), the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the International Network for Community Supported Agriculture (URGECI), the World March of Women (WMW), the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), and others – have coordinated globally through the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC). In the 1990s, the IPC recognized that the biggest threat to national struggles for food sovereignty was coming from the World Trade Organization (WTO), where corporations could coordinate and have a big influence. Through the IPC, global social movements worked to find opportunities within the United Nations – an institution which is based in human rights – to coordinate and push back against global corporate capitalism and the forces of colonialism, racism, and patriarchy.



Social Movements and NGOs

What is the difference between an NGO and a social movement, and why is it important?

First, social movements are organizations or networks that represent specific groups of people – such as farmers with land, rural workers without land, fishing communities, low-income urban communities, and indigenous peoples – and their demands for justice and human rights. That means that social movements are organizations that are based in communities, staffed by community members, and led by communities.

On the other hand, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are professional, non-profit organizations that provide services and support to communities. They are not necessarily based in communities or led by communities, though in many cases NGOs can provide essential services and can stand alongside communities in fighting for justice.

In North America today, and for a long time at the UN, NGOs were the main voice and representative for people living in poverty and facing hunger, even though social movements are the authentic voice of the people. It is critical to the struggle for food sovereignty and agroecology that NGOs work with social movements and ensure that they are strengthened and supported.

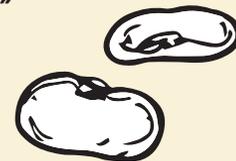
In 2008-2009, the IPC pushed for and got a major reform of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the most important institution for food and agriculture policy within the UN. The CFS was charged with eliminating hunger and ensuring the right to food for all, and it created new rules that allowed “civil society organizations” – meaning social movements, as well as non-profit NGOs – to have more voice, influence, and power than ever before. Before, civil society organizations could only speak for one or two minutes to governments, but now, farmers’ movements, indigenous peoples’ organizations, NGOs, and others are able to debate and negotiate with governments as equals. Hundreds of agroecology, food sovereignty and human rights organizations from across the world work through the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSM) at the CFS (see box for more information).



“The CFS is our space. We, the farmers and food producers, are mandated to be here. I see the CFS as the space where we can both influence governments and support governments who want to resist the industrial agriculture that’s being pushed onto them, including with genetically-engineered seeds and land grabbing, and all of the things that are happening around the world.”

“While there is still much work to be done, without Via Campesina, these advances in the transformation of our food system, the strength of social movements, and the accompanying political analysis would not be occurring.”

— Patti Naylor





What is the CSM?

The Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM) of the CFS was established in 2010 as part of substantive reform of the Committee on World Food Security following the 2007-2008 World Food Crisis that recognized that farmer, food producer, and other impacted communities have priority as "holders" of the right to foods and which gave civil society as much of a voice as governments. The reform was a result of decades of organizing by social movements at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the Committee on World Food Security.

The CSM is self-organized into 11 Constituencies: Smallholders Farmers, Pastoralists/Herders, Fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples, Consumers, Urban Food Insecure, Agricultural and Food Workers, Women, Youth, Landless, and NGOs. In addition, there are 17 sub-regions represented: North America, Central America and Caribbean, Andean Region, Southern Cone, West Europe, East Europe, North Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, West Africa, South Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, Australasia, and Pacific.

The North America focal point for the CSM is Patti Naylor. www.csm4cfs.org / www.foodsovereignty.org

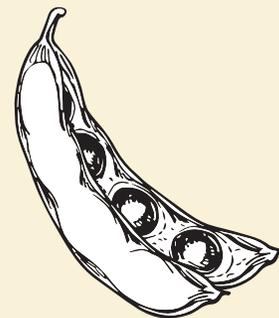


It is particularly important for North American farmers and food producers to be able to go to global policy spaces and challenge diplomats from their governments who promote the interests and agenda of agribusiness corporations but claim to be speaking for farmers. Through the CSM, family farmers from the US and Canada can represent themselves and challenge the agribusiness agenda from their own experiences.

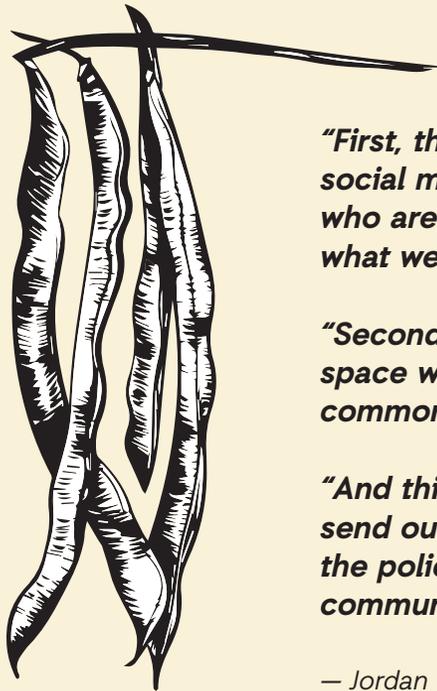
“So much of the negativity that some of our allies from other countries associate with the US is because of how the US government shows up in these UN spaces, as well as how these trade regimes are impacting folks in other countries.”

“Showing up in these multilateral spaces like the CFS gives us the opportunity to hear from those rural communities who are on the losing end of that corporate trade agenda and ensures that we’re working in solidarity with our allies. If done right, we can use public institutions to our advantage that can help the most people and the most vulnerable.”

— Jordan Treakle



Engagement by North Americans in the Rome-based agencies has clear strategic value. The CFS can play three important roles for grassroots organizations in the US. The policy documents that emerge from UN processes – like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP) and others – can be used by grassroots organizations to pressure their governments to deliver on their human rights obligations. Grassroots organizations can also coordinate globally and strengthen their efforts, and they can learn from each other and develop their analysis and strategy.



“First, the participatory policymaking role and process at the CFS allows social movements a strong platform to denounce the role of governments who aren’t representing the majority of their citizens’ interests. And that’s what we face in the US and in so many countries.”

“Second, it’s a space where we can build collective power, a physical space where we can bring actors from all over the world together and find common ground and full power.”

“And third, the importance of political education: it’s a place where we can send our farmer organizers to learn about the struggle and the tactics and the policy goals and the narratives and then bring that back to our home communities.”

— Jordan Treakle

For grassroots organizations from North America, the CFS is also an important beacon because it is a public institution that has not been corrupted by corporate money and influence. Many people in the US are jaded by government and discouraged that people and communities are shut out of policymaking and advocacy. But at the CFS, grassroots leaders can see what public institutions can be.



“I think that having institutions like the CFS at the global level – institutions that are more open, participatory, and inclusive, and that give space for social movements and producers to have an autonomous voice in policymaking — is so important because it shows the way that public institutions should function, and how they can help our work and actually improve our members’ livelihoods, even if it’s at that very broad and general policy, ‘soft law,’ kind of realm.”

— Jordan Treacle

Jordan Treacle is the National Programs and Policy Coordinator at the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC, www.nffc.net). Originally from the mountains of western North Carolina, Jordan worked with the Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA to strengthen farmer lands rights in the southeastern U.S., and he also worked with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to promote agroecology with civil society organizations and movements.



“I was amazed at what a struggle it is to get good language in policy documents, language that we see is important. It is a real struggle, but if we don’t take this space, then the future is going to be grim. The struggles of peasants around the world will be even more of a struggle, and it will be very difficult for people in the future. I see it as a very important space.”

— Patti Naylor

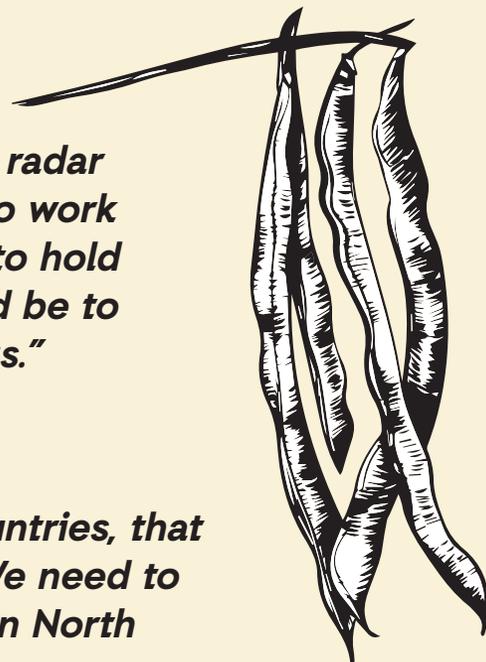
One of the most important things that North American civil society can do in global policy spaces is to challenge and hold accountable their own governments. The US government delegation at CFS is particularly hostile to promoting the human right to food, agroecology, or food sovereignty. US delegates actively block agroecology and promote industrial agriculture, often claiming to have the support of US farmers for this agenda. However, most people in the US do not know much about the UN or what the US government does there.

“Efforts by the US government to undermine these multilateral spaces like the CFS have flown under the radar for so many years. We can’t stand for this. We need to work collectively in the US to build out the tools we need to hold these public institutions accountable. Our goal should be to make all of these public institutions accountable to us.”

— Jordan Treakle

“If we can have a stronger voice in our own countries, that would be very powerful for the rest of world. We need to realize that our voice needs to be heard here, in North America, as much as in global policy spaces, because we need to bring the voices [of social movement allies from other countries] to the United States.”

— Patti Naylor





Food Secure Canada and the National Food Policy

Food Secure Canada has been highly successful in bringing together voices on child nutrition, poverty and food justice, farm and food workers rights, agroecology, and Indigenous food sovereignty, among others, to the national stage in Canada. Through the multi-year Peoples Food Policy Project (2008-2011), a wide range of grassroots food networks, NGOs and researchers came together to call for a national food policy for Canada, using a food sovereignty frame, and holding more than 3,000 discussions on food policy across the country. The PFP's leaders had been highly influenced by the "six pillars of food sovereignty" coined at the 2007 Nyéléni food sovereignty gathering in Mali, and adopted them as the PFP's policy framework, while adding a seventh pillar: Food is Sacred. After several years of policy dialogue and advocacy led by organizational members of Food Secure Canada, the Canadian government mandated its Minister of Agriculture to develop a National Food Policy, which was released in 2019.

"We have a huge responsibility...and a way to start is by challenging the way the United States shows up in international spaces. It's a heavy lift, but who else is going to do it besides North American-based activists?"

— Jahi Chappell

Connecting Our Common Struggles: From Words to Action, From Policy to Practice

“The reality is that the climate will continue to evolve. We are continuing down the sixth epoch, the sixth and greatest mass extinction. How do we prepare ourselves, our communities, to be as resilient as possible? Because as the climate destabilizes, capitalism is going to impose more and more force – in its state of crisis, it’s just going to find a new way to do what it does best, which is exploit, destabilize, and restructure economies – and we’re already seeing this. We just have to find the best way to create our own quilombos, if you will, our own Maroon villages here and there, in the context of a global society.”

— Blain Snipstal

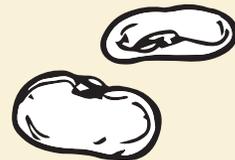
North Americans who have engaged in international work -- whether solidarity actions, learning exchanges, or policy work -- affirm that it has sharpened their political analysis and outlook, as well as deepened their commitment to doing work back in their own communities. The benefits of connecting across borders have far outweighed the perceived ‘costs’, mostly related to the lack of time and capacity to do it all. However, the lack of financial resources for social movements, and the need for stronger connections between national movements, are more obvious than ever. To spread agroecology within local communities and build the kind of political power needed to change policy and shift resources, there needs to be more funding and support for organizing.





“In Brazil and France and Austria, you’ve seen Agroecology as a result of grassroots mobilization. In the United States, it’s been almost entirely academics. Movements haven’t had support for organizing and so have been trying to get the policy without the mass power. And it’s because of the resources, not from a lack of understanding or desire, that we haven’t done mass power-building.”

— Jahi Chappell



There are a handful of new human rights instruments and policy recommendations that grassroots organizations in North America can use to pressure their governments. In particular, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), the Voluntary Guidelines on the Rights to Land Tenure (VGGTs), the human right to adequate food, and the CFS’ work on Agroecology could help grassroots organizations in the US and Canada to advance their struggle.



“In the US context, I think that there are a lot of policy tools out there. The work has been done to get those policy wins and to build out a lot of good resources. The UN Declaration on Peasant Rights is a legal tool that can actually help people’s livelihoods.”

“The challenge now is to get these policy frameworks down to the grassroots and to do the political education and organizing at the local level, which is a critical step to push our public institutions to implement these policy frameworks. How does agroecology and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants show up in North America, given the history of genocide against indigenous peoples, legacy of slavery, and high levels of corporate concentration and power in the U.S. food system? I think we as civil society and social movements in the U.S. have never been better positioned to make gains on these food sovereignty issues.”

— Jordan Treakle

To build up power to support these policies, grassroots organizations need to focus on how to communicate to their members and to others in their communities. Even though these policy ideas will benefit community members, not everyone will understand this right away. That is why communication, connection, and organizing is so important.



“We need to talk about our vision, our positive vision, which is agroecology, to show that there is hope, there is a way forward, and there are people all around the world working on the same kind of vision. We need to bring in our friends and neighbors and create networks.”

— Patti Naylor

When social movements and grassroots organizations fight for and win policy changes at the global level, like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and policy recognition for agroecology, their advocacy is grounded in their local struggles and the need to support food producers and their communities. Those policies that they fought for can then be brought back home and used strengthen national campaigns and local struggles. Because at the end of the day, it is the work that farmers and workers are doing to feed communities that is the basis for the work of policy advocacy.

“We need to always double down to do the work of creating the material conditions for which the world we want to see can come into being, because that’s within our hands. Space at the UN and similar institutions is always going to be conditional because we are not the creators of those institutions. But where we have space is still at the local level. It’s still fighting to make material improvements in the conditions of the communities that we inhabit and building alliances and linkages to other ones.”

— Blain Snipstal





Grassroots Organizations Take on Global Food and Agriculture Issues in the US

While the US Department of Agriculture provides funding for anti-hunger programs, organic agriculture, and conservation within the US, at the CFS and in other global food and agriculture policy spaces, US diplomats promote GMOs, pesticides, free markets, and agribusiness solutions, and they often try to block, stall, or undermine recognition of human rights, agroecology, or food sovereignty. The US government is one of the only governments in the world that does not recognize the human right to food, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the more recent UN Declaration on Peasant Rights and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDRPOP).

Under the Trump Administration, the US government became even more hostile to UN processes and to social movement solutions. President Trump nominated agribusiness baron Kip Tom to be the Ambassador to the UN Food and Agriculture Agencies in Rome, and under his tenure, the US delegation took unprecedented steps to block important work at the CFS around agroecology.

In response, US grassroots organizations mobilized to push back against the US government:

October 2019: Family farm leader Patti Naylor delivers a letter to Ambassador Tom signed by over 50 organizations calling for the US government to immediately stop its obstruction at the UN and to recognize that millions of people in the US want to transition to agroecology.

November 2019: U.S. family farm representatives challenge the US government at a consultation with the CFS by defending the UN Declaration on Peasant Rights and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDRPOP), which the US government strongly opposes.

October 2020: The US Food Sovereignty Alliance sends another letter to Ambassador Tom denouncing fear-mongering comments he made to the US Department of Agriculture claiming that agroecology was “anti-science,” anti-American, and that the world would face famine without using synthetic agrochemicals.

October 2020: The US Food Sovereignty Alliance organizes a national webinar to raise concerns that the UN Food Systems Summit, proposed for September 2021, is being controlled by agribusiness and will undermine the work of social movements at the CFS.

March 2021: Family farm organizations and their allies meet with the Biden Administration to raise concerns about agribusiness influence on the UN Food Systems Summit and the US government.

April 2021: US organizations, led by the North American region of the CSM, the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, and La Via Campesina North America, hold a virtual North American Peoples’ Encounter to discuss and plan opposition to the UN Food Systems Summit.

July 2021: US organizations join the global People’s Counter-Mobilization to Transform Corporate Food Systems, a four-day event attended by 9,000 people online that reached over 10 million people on social media.

September 2021: US organizations mobilize against the UN Food Systems Summit and raise up their alternatives.

*We will continue organizing our autonomous spaces for the food sovereignty movement into the future.
Join US!*

Conclusion: Joining the Fight and Staying Connected

“I just implore folks who hear the call of Mother Earth to return to her, or to support those that have returned to her and are working their best in their most dignified way to push through. Continue the struggle, which is a righteous struggle for agroecology, for an improved existence, to end human suffering, and to really engage in acts of service, just because you can, not because it’s the right thing to do.”

— Blain Snipstal

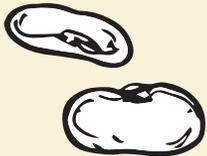


The US and Canadian governments, as well as their multinational corporations, play a major role in propping up the existing unjust and unsustainable food system. The system is not broken, it was designed to work this way – and they were its chief architects. That is why people and movements in the US and Canada have a heightened responsibility to stand together and hold our governments and corporations accountable.

In order to join the fight and stand connected, community-based organizations in the US and Canada need to get stronger. To make this happen, farmers and organizers building agroecology on the ground need more support. People at all levels need to join and support community organizations, and at the national level, organizations need to come together and cooperate to challenge governments. And finally, we need to talk with and learn from each other, building a common understanding and a common story about the need to change our food system.

Support people producing healthy food and organizing communities.

- Individuals can shop at farmers' markets and donate to community-based organizations helping to build food sovereignty and food justice.
- Large non-profit or philanthropic organizations can provide resources to grassroots groups who are doing the long-term organizing on the ground.



“There’s been a lack of support for basic organizing, and maybe that’s a big part of why agroecology hasn’t had the same kind of roots or solidarity in the United States.”

— Jahi Chappell

Join national networks for agroecology and food sovereignty.

- Community-based organizations can join national networks like the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, Food Secure Canada, and the North American region of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSM-NA) which are creating space for communities to fight for food sovereignty, agroecology, and the right to food at the national level.



“We need to work collectively in the US to hold our public institutions accountable. We can’t stand for a continuation of the status quo.”

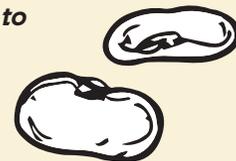
— Jordan Treacle

Make connections and start dialogues for food sovereignty, climate justice, and human rights.

- Individuals and organizations can gather resources and organize workshops and discussions on agroecology, food, and environmental justice.
- Everyone can engage their friends and neighbors in conversations about the food system, social justice, climate change, and other important but difficult issues.

“The pandemic has showed us is that we really need conversations. We really need to strive to make connections with people.”

— Patti Naylor





Learn about the work of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM) of the Committee for World Food Security: www.csm4cfs.org.

For more information and resources on how you can get involved in the agroecology and food sovereignty movement in the US and Canada, visit these organizations' websites:

- * The National Family Farm Coalition (www.nffc.net)
- * SAAFON (www.saaфон.org)
- * The US Food Sovereignty Alliance (www.usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org)
- * Family Farm Defenders (www.familyfarmers.org)
- * Earth-Bound Building Collective (www.earthboundbuilding.com)
- * National Farmers Union Canada (www.nfu.ca)
- * Food Secure Canada (www.foodsecurecanada.org)
- * ActionAid USA (www.actionaidusa.org)