



GROWING
FOOD
SOVEREIGNTY
TOGETHER

WRITTEN BY YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ACROSS EUROPE

THE NEED FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Young Friends of the Earth Europe, Youth of La Via Campesina Europe and ASEED Europe have decided to join forces to define our thoughts and demands regarding food sovereignty. We are peasants, landless workers, activists, students, workers, consumers who have worked with this topic for a number of years. Over the course of our experience we have spoken with a multitude of stakeholders within the food system.

We, as well as many others, are concerned by the current neoliberal and capitalist approach to the global food system. Thus far, it has resulted in the current climate, soil and biodiversity crisis and worsening working conditions in many parts of the world.

At the production end, efficiency and yield based production has put pressure on rural life, with the Common Agricultural Policy linked to increased suicide in Sweden, Denmark, Ireland and Scotland in the early 1990s [1]. Human rights violations have been acknowledged in migrant work in Germany and Europe by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights and the German Institute for Human Rights [2,3].

On top of this, there is increased nitrogen pollution, loss of soil fertility, increasing emissions, loss of species diversity and reduced land-access for small-scale farmers and people who are new to farming. All of this while multinational corporations such as Bayer-Monsanto and Yara continue to turn over multi-billion revenues and sustain agricultural dependence on fossil fuels.

At the consumption end, our high focus on making profit has led the food sector to push for minimising costs of production. This has improved access to a variety of food in some cases, however, many of these have low nutritional value and are highly processed, contributing to the increase of diet-related health epidemics [4]. Furthermore, the lack of fresh food for many communities, usually living in disadvantaged areas, contributes further to these problems.

As young people, we want to be able to have a future, we want future generations to be able to live on an earth that is still bearable, with breathable air, clean water, accessible resources, local, healthy food and active communities. We don't want rural communities and people's health to fall victim, while corporations continue to maximize and increase their profits.

Our proposals for the solutions are centred around food sovereignty, a system which would give communities control over the way food is produced, traded and consumed. It envisions a food system designed to help people and the environment rather than making profits for multinational corporations. [5]

We have the following proposals for the four main stakeholder groups which we have identified:



POLICYMAKERS

Policymakers are regional, national and European politicians and advisers, who directly affect policy change. We believe these players are in a powerful position when it comes to the food system. With 40% of the EU budget being spent on agriculture, the next addition of the Common Agricultural Policy in 2021 provides an opportunity to make major alterations to the functioning of our food system and rural life. Within this policy and those at national levels we demand:

FINANCIAL & RESOURCE INCENTIVES FOR AGRO-ECOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVES

- Increase in funding and resources for non-corporate seed cooperatives, as well as learning and exchange networks for farmers.
- Reduction in taxes and increased subsidies for locally distributed and agroecological food.
- Start subsidising small-scale farms, not only the larger producers.
- A legal framework that facilitates access to land, especially for neo-rural peasants (people who are new to farming).
- A transition towards true pricing on food - including air miles and environmental impact of production, ensuring that farmers and farmworkers are fairly paid.
- Providing people from low income households with "food insurance" to access to nutritious food.
- Supporting a just transition for farmers towards localised and agroecological production.

CHANGE IN TRADE POLICY

- Create international trade agreements which put human rights and the environment first, not the interests of big transnational corporations.
- Recognise that international trade agreements influence national policies on food.
- Demand that international trade agreements are a basis for supporting trade within local markets, thus let the food system be less dependent on global trade with goods.
- Stop dumping goods into distant and weaker markets.
- Support the work towards the binding UN treaty on Business and Human rights. Thus, we can hold transnational corporations accountable for human rights violations.
- A level playing field for farmers through market regulations, especially in relation between the Global South and North.
- Stop intellectual property rights on food and seeds.



PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES

The structural change that we need in our food and farming system will not only come from individual consumer choices. But this shouldn't stop us supporting and developing the sustainable future systems we need when buying food, by building stronger links between farmers and people and communities.

THIS MEANS

- Local, organic and healthy food should be accessible and affordable for all - especially those who are time - and money poor.
- This should happen via local markets, food cooperatives and culturally-appropriate and effective alternatives to the current dominant food system.
- This needs to be supported by governments, which should subsidise local food by making the price of food reflect production and transport.
- People should be empowered to seek out opportunities to support farmers in making the transition towards a more sustainable system of food production - for example volunteering at farms, shops and becoming a part of community supported agriculture (CSA).

PACKAGING

- Zero-waste shopping should be supported. Food should not be wrapped in unnecessary packaging – especially plastic.
- Where packaging is necessary, it should be made from recycled recyclable materials.
- Food should be sold with full transparency for consumers regarding where it comes from.

FOOD WASTE should be minimised by

- Socially responsible distribution of food waste.
- Composting, which should be normalised and encouraged.
- Increasing the sale of "ugly" items (vegetables that are "out of shape" etc.).
- Where appropriate, being re-used for animal food.
- Making sure distribution and consumption patterns reduce it as much as possible.
- Storing food by fermentation, drying it, and freezing where necessary.

PRODUCTION

- Everyone should be supported to grow their own food where possible, including access to land for growing food.
- People should also be empowered to grow co-operatively, to encourage sharing economies.

ANIMAL PRODUCTS

- Industrial meat production should be stopped.
- Animals can be an important part of agroecological farming and extensive agriculture systems, but animal consumption should be reduced in industrial countries.



FARMERS &

We demand a food and farming system that is fair for farmers and farmworkers, provides them with good livelihoods and fair prices, and respects their working rights.

THIS MEANS THEY SHOULD

- Receive minimum prices for food that mean a fair income and a good life.
- Have access to their own seeds – and not be locked in to cycles of needing to buy seeds from corporations.
- Be able to afford to produce seasonal food for local markets, with diversified crops.
- Be able to afford to farm sustainably, and at a small scale, and supported to rediscover traditional technologies for growing.
- Be supported in a just transition to switch away from industrial farming, agrochemicals and synthetic pesticide use to agroecology, and farm in harmony with nature.
- Be supported in sharing best practice and knowledge on how to keep the soil alive.
- Be financially supported to grow food instead of fodder.
- Be financially supported by their local community where possible through Community-Supported Agriculture projects, or co-operative farms – meaning short supply chains.

FOOD PRODUCERS



EDUCATION

We demand a system that educates farmers and consumers, young and old on agro-ecological practices, the true value of food, the impacts of agricultural systems on biodiversity and the environment and the benefits of locally produced, seasonal produce.

THIS MEANS

- Mainstream agricultural education that focuses on agroecology, biodiversity, and farming in harmony with nature as opposed to industrial farming practices and monocultures.
- Food and agriculture education across all generations.
- Provision of school gardens in all schools so children can gain a connection with nature and an understanding of where their food comes from.
- An increase in education around farming for soil for all citizens.
- Embedding food & agriculture education, including practical skills in mainstream curriculums.
- Educating consumers so they understand the value of the food they consume.
- Education of all citizens on the impacts of the food they consume, including adequate labeling of food.
- Education of all citizens on the environmental impacts of food waste and the skills to manage food waste well.
- Education of all citizens on the seasonality of foods & how to cook with seasonal produce.
- Increased access to community gardens where citizens can learn about growing, composting and the value of food.
- Incentives for citizens to spend time on farms so that they can gain an understanding and appreciation of the production of food.

CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

The paths and solutions to create food sovereignty are already there and now is the time to implement them. Acknowledging that the food system has a major impact on environment, climate and social issues is crucial.

Farmers are the backbone of society and if we do not support them in a just transition to a sustainable and healthy food and farming system, we will remain locked into industrial agricultural production.

Some positive recent developments in international decision-making spaces show a path forward.

A UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas was adopted in December 2018 after years of campaigning from La Via Campesina. [6]

This declaration gives legal and political weight to the struggles of peasants for recognition, control over land, social protection, natural resources and more.

In 2019, a proposal for a Common Food Policy was launched by the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES). [7]

Policy initiatives like these need to be taken up and developed at local, national and international levels if we want to turn the current trend towards industrial agriculture and guarantee a safe, healthy and secure future for farmers, farmworkers, nature and society as a whole.



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