



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 those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the corporate trade and food regime, and to provide direction for food, farming, pastoral, and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock, and biodiversity are in the hands of those who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes, and generations.

Where does the concept of Food Sovereignty come from?

The concept of food sovereignty was developed by Via Campesina (an international movement) and brought to the public debate during the World Food Summit in 1996 and represents an alternative to neo-liberal policies. Since then, that concept has become a major issue of the international agricultural debate, even within the United Nations bodies. Via Campesina has played a major role in the development of international networks gathering social, environmental movements, development NGOs, and consumers.

How are neo-liberal policies wrecking food sovereignty?

Neo-liberal policies prioritize international trade, not food for people. They haven't contributed at all to hunger eradication in the world. On the contrary, they have increased peoples' dependence on agricultural imports and have strengthened the industrialization of agriculture, jeopardizing the genetic, cultural, and environmental heritage of our planet, as well as our health. They have forced millions of farmers to give up traditional agricultural practices, creating a rural exodus and forcing migration in search of food and work. International institutions such as IMF (International Monetary Fund), the World Bank, and WTO (World Trade Organization) have implemented policies dictated by the interests of large companies and superpowers. International, regional, or bilateral "free" trade agreements of agricultural products actually allow those companies to control the globalized food market.

Does Food Sovereignty include fair trade?

Food sovereignty is not contrary to trade but to the priority given to exports. Under the responsibility of United Nations (UN) trade must be granted a new framework, which 1) prioritizes local and regional production before export, 2) allows the Countries/Unions to protect themselves from low priced imports, 3) permits public aid to farmers, provided these are not intended directly or indirectly to export at low prices, and 4) guarantees stable agricultural prices at an international level through international agreements of supply management.

Agricultural policies have to support sustainable family farming and fishing in the North and the South. In order to be able to make their food sovereignty work, countries in the North and in the South have to be able to support their agriculture and fishing to guarantee the right to food of their populations, to preserve their environment, to develop sustainable agriculture and to protect themselves against dumping. They should also be able to support their agriculture and fishing to fulfill other public interests that can differ according to countries and their cultural traditions. But at present the United States and the European Union in particular abuse public support to reduce their internal market prices and to dump their surpluses on the international markets, destroying family farm based agriculture and fishing in the North and the South.