

Food sovereignty: questions and answers

What are we talking about?

1. What do you mean by food sovereignty?

Food sovereignty is a set of principles that was developed by La Via Campesina, the international movement which brings together 200 million small and medium-scale farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from 70 countries. So the concept of food sovereignty evolved through the experience and analysis of the people who produce most of the world's food.

At its heart, food sovereignty means right of peoples to define their own food systems. Food sovereignty puts the very people who produce, distribute and consume food at the centre of food systems and policies, rather than the demands of markets and corporations that have come to dominate the global food system.

In 2007, more than 500 representatives of organisations of small-scale farmers and fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers and environmental and urban movements from over 80 countries gathered together in the village of Nyéléni in Sélingué, Mali to strengthen the global movement for food sovereignty. That gathering resulted in the Nyéléni declaration,ⁱ outlining the agreed principles of food sovereignty and a set of collective actions.

The principles in the Nyéléni declaration can be summarised as:ⁱⁱ

- **Food as a right, not a commodity.** Food sovereignty upholds the right of individuals and communities to define their own food and agriculture systems to provide healthy and culturally appropriate food.
- **Valuing food providers.** Farmers may suffer exploitation or even violence at the hands of corporate landowners and buyers. People are often pushed off their land by mining concerns or agribusiness. Small farms are being lost at an alarming rate. In Europe, for example, three family farms disappear every minute.ⁱⁱⁱ Food sovereignty asserts food providers' rights to live and work in dignity.
- **Prioritising local and regional provision over distant markets.** Food is first and foremost sustenance for the community and secondarily a commodity to be traded. Food sovereignty means that local and regional provision takes precedence over supplying distant markets, and export-orientated agriculture is rejected. Food sovereignty works to bring food producers and consumers closer together.
- **Control of land and resources being in the hands of food producers rather than privatised by corporations.** It also means that resources can be used in more socially and environmentally sustainable ways.
- **Building knowledge and skills.** Food sovereignty calls for valuing and support for producers' knowledge and skills, as this local expertise can often be undermined by modern technologies, such as genetic modification.

- **Protecting natural resources.** Food sovereignty principles advocate working with nature and avoiding environmentally damaging industrial methods that rely on non-renewable resources.

2. What is the difference between food sovereignty and food security?

Food security focuses on people having enough to eat and therefore assumes that the solution is to hand out more food, regardless of how it is produced or distributed. This fails to acknowledge or address many of the problems of the current unfair and unsustainable food system.

Food sovereignty is broader in scope. It is concerned with the power imbalances inherent in the current global food system and who controls how food is produced and distributed. It is about people's democratic right to decide and take control of their own food and agricultural systems

3. What is agroecology?

Agroecology means farming with nature rather than against it.^{iv} Agroecology uses ecological theory to study, design and manage agricultural systems that are productive but also conserve natural resources. Agroecological farming focuses on a minimal use of external inputs, like chemical fertilisers, in favour of methods such as improving soil quality and controlling pests and disease with natural predators.

Agroecology has played a key role in revitalising the productivity of small scale farming systems. Since the 1980s, thousands of projects started by NGOs, farmers' organisations and university and research centres have applied general agroecological principles to customise agricultural technologies to local needs and circumstances, improving yields while conserving natural resources and biodiversity.

It has been estimated that small-scale farmers could double food production within 10 years in some of the poorest regions of the world by using agroecological methods.^v

Why do we need to change our food system?

4. What are the problems of the current food system?

Superficially, the food system seems to be working well in the UK. Supermarkets appear to offer convenience, choice and efficiency, with people having to spend much less of their income on food than just a few decades ago.

However, this food system imposes many hidden costs on the public. These include tax credits to top up food workers' low wages, the burden on the NHS from diet-related diseases, and clean up costs for pollution from industrial agricultural systems. Supermarkets also funnel money out of local communities to management and shareholders, unlike local food businesses and projects which tend to recycle money within the economy of the local area.

A handful of multinational corporations are increasingly dominating the production, processing, distribution, marketing and retailing of food. This concentration of power enables them to wipe out competition or dictate tough terms to their suppliers on everything from prices to standardised products. Sixty years ago, European and US farmers received 45-60 per cent of the money that consumers spent on food. By 2002, that had dropped to 7 per cent in the UK.^{vi}

A huge number of livelihoods in farming and independent shops have been destroyed, with pressure for low prices encouraging exploitation of agricultural workers in the UK and abroad. Supermarket jobs that they offer are mainly poorly paid. For example, the average supermarket worker would have to work for 525 years to earn the annual salary of Tesco's chief executive for 2011-12.^{vii}

Meanwhile, the global food system is characterised by striking inequalities.^{viii} Globally, 1.4 billion people are overweight or obese,^{ix} while nearly a billion go hungry.

70 per cent of the developing world's 1.4 billion extremely poor people live in rural areas and the majority of these people depend on small-scale, family-based agriculture for their livelihoods.^x However, the model of large-scale, industrialised agriculture and corporate control of the food chain that began in industrialised countries is becoming dominant worldwide and is putting those livelihoods at risk, threatening even greater poverty.

Reliance on food imports and spikes in international prices caused by factors such as financial speculation have seen consumers exposed to sharp food price rises in recent years. The average UK household food bill rose by nearly £200 in 2011, while millions in the global south have been pushed into extreme poverty.^{xi}

International trade agreements have forced developing countries to cut support to their own farmers and to open their agricultural markets to the global economy. This inevitably favours large scale farmers and producers, and particularly subsidised operations in Europe and the US, putting production for local markets at a disadvantage.

For example, in Sri Lanka, 90 per cent of the poor are small-scale farmers and landless workers, most of whom try to make a living from domestic food production. However, the Sri Lankan government has created an export-led agricultural economy, with plantations, cash-crops for export and increases in imported foods. This has resulted in the collapse in price of some domestically produced crops, such as rice, leading to increased malnutrition among the rural poor, increased social disparity, political unrest and farmer suicides.^{xii}

The system of food production based on intensive, industrial scale agriculture and fisheries is also environmentally unsustainable. Polluting inputs, long-distance transport, over-packing and waste are leading to:

- loss of soil fertility
- soil erosion
- loss of groundwater

- reliance on fossil fuels for nitrogen fertilisers and pesticides
- the contamination of land and water as pollutants accumulate.

The corporatised, global food system fails to properly value food and food producers. The industrialised countries' emphasis on competing in international markets is blind to human and environmental costs and to the undemocratic concentration of power.

5. Can't we just have another green revolution to improve food production?

The green revolution refers to a series of initiatives that occurred mainly between the late 1960s and 1990 aimed at increasing agricultural production across the globe. The main focus of the revolution was on the research, development and transfer of agricultural technology, such as hybrid seeds and fertilisers. However, having another green revolution would be more harmful than helpful for two main reasons.

Firstly, while the green revolution may have produced more food, it did not manage to reduce hunger because it did nothing to address the problems of distribution. From 1970 to 1990, when the green revolution expanded most rapidly, the number of hungry people in the world only decreased because of the achievements of China – where the green revolution was not pursued. Excluding China, the number of hungry people in the world actually increased by 11 per cent.^{xiii} Jean Ziegler, UN special rapporteur on the right to food has pointed out that there is now enough food to feed 12 billion people^{xiv}.

Secondly, the switch to evermore industrial farming methods was accompanied by social and environmental problems. Land, resources, power and money were concentrated in the hands of corporations and large farms as smaller farmers became reliant on expensive products. La Via Campesina is clear that *“the costs of production under the conventional “Green Revolution” model are more expensive and out of the reach of small holder farmers”*.^{xv} There was also an increase in pollution, whilst biodiversity decreased and soil was eroded.

6. Doesn't climate change mean we need genetic modification (GM) technologies?

No. Climate change means that we must alter the way that food is grown and produced will certainly be needed, but genetic modification (GM) of seeds is not the answer.

There are a number of problems with GM, particularly for small-scale farmers and producers but also for the environment. These include:

Increased corporate control of seeds. Being able to save and use seed from one year to the next is very important for small-scale farmers. However once a seed has been genetically modified then it can be patented by the company that modified it and conditions placed on its use. Monsanto, for example, forces growers to sign a “technology use agreement” when growing its patented GM crops which stipulates that the farmer cannot save the seeds.^{xvi} Having to purchase new seed each year, and often fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides to

go with that, is a cost that many small-scale farmers in developing countries cannot afford. This has led to a spate of farmer suicides over the past five years. In India it is reported that every twelve hours a farmer commits suicide.^{xvii} There have even been cases of GM companies taking farmers to court for being in possession of seed that they had not paid for, after their non-GM crops were contaminated by GM seed from neighbouring farms.^{xviii}

Increased industrial inputs. One of the selling points of some GM crops is that they require less use of pesticides. However, in practice it has been observed that there have required an increased use of synthetic chemicals to control pests. Research has shown that weeds are now developing resistance to the GM companies' herbicides and pesticides that are designed to be used with their crops, and that this has led to increasing infestations of "superweeds".^{xix}

GM technologies are more likely to increase the problems related to climate change as they ultimately lead to greater reliance on a few key varieties of crops. As weather patterns fluctuate and become more extreme, greater diversity, not less, is the key to increased resilience. Hellen Yego, a Kenyan small-holder farmer and activist, argues that while indigenous seeds germinate at different times making them unsuitable for mechanical harvesting, it does mean that extreme weather is less likely to destroy an entire crop.

As an alternative to GM technologies which maintain the balance of power in favour of corporations and large farmers, agroecological practices and food sovereignty can help to sequester carbon, restore soil and groundwater, and increase local control of food production.

What changes are needed?

7. What changes do you want to see?

WDM supports the actions called for in the declaration from the Nyéléni Europe forum.^{xx} This was a gathering of around 400 food producers and activists in Austria in 2011, following on from the 2007 meeting in Mali, to catalyse a food sovereignty movement in Europe. The declaration calls for a decentralised food system based on cooperation and democracy rather than profits.

This requires a radically reformed Common Agricultural Policy, to support small-scale sustainable farming rather than seeking to undercut producers worldwide;^{xxi} removal of the EU Biofuels Directive, which sees food being diverted to meet the fuel demands of multi-national companies and consumers at the expense of people in the global south being able to afford to eat; and regulation to curb food speculation.

The declaration emphasises ensuring decent livelihoods for workers and access to healthy food for all, as well as gender equality. It calls for ecological farming and sustainable food chains and for rich countries to reduce meat consumption and shift to diets based on local and seasonal foods. To achieve this, steps include developing local infrastructure, improving public procurement, land reform and protecting the commons. In addition, global governance of trade must be reformed.

8. How does food sovereignty relate to women's rights?

As most small-scale farmers are women, women are responsible for producing between 60 and 80 per cent of food in developing countries, and feeding half the population globally.^{xxii} However, within agriculture women have been systematically marginalised, ignored in government policy and frequently prevented from controlling or owning the land they work. Fewer than 10 per cent of woman farmers in India, Nepal and Thailand own land. And in Africa, in comparison to male smallholders, women receive just a tenth of the credit available to their male counterparts.^{xxiii}

Land grabs, fuelled by rising food, fuel and land prices under the industrialised regime, affect women disproportionately. For example, due to the gendered divisions of labour, women bear the social costs of displacement as they are forced onto more marginal lands in search of food and water for their family. Where land grabs result in small holdings being replaced by plantations, women who are offered jobs tend to be paid less and denied labour rights.

However, women have a strong history of organising collective resistance against the oppressive forces of industrialisation and rising food prices. In the food sovereignty movement women are able to take a central role in decision making and creation of vibrant local economies, such as the *Chalayplasa*, a barter-based network of local food markets in Peru.^{xxiv} This gives small-holder subsistence farmers direct market access and the opportunity to buy locally-grown produce which they are unable to grow themselves.

Rural women have been, and continue to be, instrumental in protecting biodiversity and opposing monoculture, as in the Movement of Peasant Women in Brazil. Responsible for maintaining and developing seed varieties passed down from generation to generation, rural women can apply their ancestral knowledge of these seeds to create local food systems, resilient to the effects of climate change. Furthermore, these seeds are patent free, a common good available to all that can be saved and used year after year.

Perhaps, most importantly, as a set of principles, food sovereignty actively facilitates equality and democratic participation of all members. The growth of food sovereignty movements will strengthen the position of women and other marginalised groups around the world and build the political capacity to defend indigenous rights.

9. How have WDM's campaigns contributed to the struggle for food sovereignty?

Global food sovereignty will require changes at international, national and local level. Many of WDM's campaigns have addressed barriers to aspects of food sovereignty.

Recently, WDM has been campaigning to prevent speculation by investment banks and other financial institutions contributing to food price rises. Deregulation has given speculators access to a market that was originally intended to help farmers deal with the uncertainties of growing crops. Now

bankers and hedge funds influence the prices of the food that they neither grow nor trade physically. European regulation is needed to prevent this.

WDM has for many years been part of the movement for trade justice, calling for the reform of international trade rules to prevent local markets in developing countries being destroyed by cheap, often subsidised, produce from the global north. These trade rules have led to many developing countries' agricultural sectors being destroyed and their becoming reliant on volatile international markets to feed their populations.

WDM also campaigned against the structural adjustment policies forced on developing countries by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and which required them to produce cash crops for export at the expense of growing food to feed local populations.

In 2000, WDM was part of an EU-wide campaign against the development of genetic modification, working with groups in the global south to highlight the negative impacts of the technology on producers in developing countries.

How are people and countries realising food sovereignty?

10. Where is food sovereignty already working?

The principles of food sovereignty are being put into practice by many farmers across the world. Poor farmers, labourers and landless peasants have formed food sovereignty movements as a means to gain land and access to food and livelihoods. Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST) began with a few families occupying large, unused landholdings owned by rich landowners but lying fallow. They reclaimed the land for agriculture in order to feed themselves. Since 1984, 370,000 families have gained access to agriculture land and the ability to feed themselves.^{xxv}

In Kerala, India, a state-run project called *Kudumbashree* has enabled poor women farmers to become self-sufficient in food.^{xxvi} A quarter of a million women in *Kudumbashree* have formed farming collectives, cultivating diverse crops organically to meet their consumption needs and selling any surplus in the local markets. This has had great environmental benefits. In the town of Perambra, for example, a large area of land lying fallow has been transformed into an area of lush vegetation. It has benefitted the poor farmers most, many of whom had previously been labourers, but now find they are earning more and have greater control of their time, resources and labour.

There are many more examples of food sovereignty principles being adopted around the world, from the government-supported, Afro-Venezuelan cacao farmers and artisanal fishermen of the coastal community of Chuao, Venezuela, to urban farmers involved in sharing knowledge through the New York Farm School.

However, full food sovereignty will require policy changes at the international level – for example the reform of international trade rules.

11. What does the food sovereignty movement look like in the UK?

Across the UK, a multitude of groups are working for a more just and sustainable food system, though not all explicitly under the banner of food sovereignty.

WDM is working with others to strengthen links between groups in the UK and internationally. Here are a few examples of activities that demonstrate the various principles, though it's hard to separate their impacts as food sovereignty is a holistic approach:

| Principle | Building | Resisting |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Right to food – not a commodity | Food co-ops put control in the hands of their workers and sell food on a non-profit basis | Food poverty campaigners are challenging the marketing of junk food to children |
| Valuing producers | Farmers' markets and box schemes help reconnect producers and consumers, cutting out big retailers and ensuring producers get a better price for their products | Unions and campaign groups are opposing exploitation of workers in the UK and abroad |
| Localising food | Urban growing can enable inner city communities to produce healthy, affordable and locally-produced food that they control | Campaigns are working to change laws and regulations that favour supermarkets and huge landowners |
| Democratic control | Seed-saving and swaps help preserve diverse varieties beyond the few products sold by supermarkets and commercial seed companies | Groups are supporting communities struggling against land grabs by large corporations |
| Building knowledge and skills | Research is showing benefits of agroecological farming, which has received little funding compared to industrial methods | Activists are taking action against genetic modification to oppose its development and stop it contaminating existing crops |
| Working with nature | Organic farming, agroecology, permaculture and other ecological approaches regenerate natural resources | Campaigners are fighting the expansion of environmentally harmful, industrial, 'zero grazing' dairies |

12. Is there any country that has made food sovereignty work on a large scale?

Venezuela and Cuba are among the countries that are pursuing food sovereignty most actively.

Cuba is the first country that has been able to make food sovereignty work on a large scale.^{xxvii} The energy embargo enforced on Cuba in the 1990s meant that the country needed to completely revolutionise its farming techniques, which until then had been heavily reliant upon fossil fuels through the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and farm machinery. Rejecting large scale, industrial farming out of necessity has meant the country has largely embraced the principles of food sovereignty, with many positive results.

In fifteen years or so, the country moved to 80 per cent organic agriculture, and from a majority of large state-owned farms to a majority of small co-operatives and privately owned farms. Some farms in Cuba report very high productivity. In urban areas, many people are involved in growing their own food wherever space is available. Now urban gardens provide 50 per cent of the vegetables needed by the people of Havana, with a population of 2.2 million people.^{xxviii} The country's experience of fuel scarcity, that made it difficult to transport food over large distances, has led to a new reliance on local economies. Even though the fuel shortage has now eased, Cuba has learnt from that experience and continues to advance in food sovereignty terms, becoming more self-reliant in food production, with farmers now amongst the highest paid workers.

In Venezuela, the human right to food, and the country's ability to feed itself have been at the heart of Venezuelan government policy since Hugo Chavez became president in 1998. For over a century, farming in Venezuela had been neglected because of a reliance on the profits from the oil industry to pay for the large-scale import of staple foods. This had led to a desertion of rural areas, with only 12 per cent of the Venezuelan population living in the countryside making it the most urbanised country in Latin America.^{xxix} After Hugo Chavez came to power, the importance of developing local, sustainable agriculture as a means to ensuring a secure supply of food for the population was enshrined in the constitution. Government support for developing sustainable agriculture has included: land reform that has allowed millions of acres of land owned by large landowners to be reclaimed for agriculture, laws requiring banks to provide credit to farmers at reasonable rates, supplying farmers with equipment such as tractors and seeds and giving them access to training in organic agricultural techniques. Farmers are also able to sell their crops to a government agricultural corporation rather than relying on intermediaries which has ensured a fairer price for their products.

Overall food production in Venezuela has increased by one quarter since 1998.^{xxx} The country has become self-sufficient in its two most important grains, corn and rice.

Encouraging alternative systems of trade between Latin American countries and investing in government-run supermarkets and agricultural corporations has led to a move away from dependence on multi-national corporations for the production and distribution of food. This has allowed a food system based on the principles of food sovereignty to thrive.

13. How wide is understanding of and conviction in food sovereignty in the world at the moment?

Support for food sovereignty has already spread around the world. In addition to the quarter-billion strong movement, La Via Campesina (see question 1), there is a large US Food Sovereignty Alliance with over 40 member organisations, and an Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa. In Europe, 400 food producers and activists met in Austria in 2011 and produced a European version of the original declaration of Nyéléni created in Mali in 2007, which outlines a vision for food sovereignty in Europe (see question 7).

Is it really practical and progressive?

14. Don't we need large scale industrial agriculture to feed an increasingly urbanised population, or could food sovereignty do this?

Research shows that food sovereignty policies are capable of feeding the world's population, even with high levels of urbanisation.^{xxxii} Not only does food sovereignty have the potential to produce enough food, it also works in a way that ensures that food can be distributed so that people get what they need.

An assessment of global agriculture, representing a consensus of more than 400 experts from around the world, was published in 2008.^{xxxii} It evaluated both local and traditional agricultural knowledge and formal technology, and called for a radical new approach to food and farming, challenging 'business as usual' scenarios which are projected to contribute to increasing environmental degradation, catastrophic climate change and inequality within the food system. In particular, it challenged the idea that biotechnology and free trade are beneficial to developing countries, supporting the calls of the food sovereignty movement.

Many multiple cropping systems, such as those developed by smallholders and subsistence farmers, show higher yields in terms of total harvest than industrial agriculture.^{xxxiii} A Latin American study of 5150 farmers, and almost 9800 hectares, showed that small farmers who shifted to organic agricultural production in all cases obtained higher net revenues relative to their previous situation.^{xxxiv}

15. Wouldn't food sovereignty make food more expensive, putting food beyond the reach of the poor?

The current food system does not serve people in poverty well: one in seven of the world's population goes hungry.^{xxxv} Reliance on international trade leaves importing countries very vulnerable to unstable markets, with the 2010 food price spike pushing 44 million more people in to extreme poverty.^{xxxvi} Even in rich countries, many people struggle to access healthy food.

Food sovereignty shortens the chain between producer and consumer, meaning that there is less pressure for profit for the handful of large corporations that dominate the global food trade. This helps to keep the price down for the consumer. Achieving food sovereignty also means removing unnecessary pressures on food prices, including excessive financial speculation, the use of crops for bio-fuels and costly inputs like chemical fertilisers.

Food sovereignty has the potential to provide more local employment by replacing industrial techniques with more skilled labour and developing local economies. Many of the policies needed to deliver food sovereignty, such as reforming the international trade system, would help to tackle poverty and inequality, enabling people to pay farmers decent prices for their produce.

It could also make small-scale farmers' livelihoods more stable and secure through their being in control of their own seed, and adoption of closed-loop agroecological farming systems that reduce waste and dependence on off-site inputs. Small-scale producers are often very poor themselves and tend to buy more food than they produce, so do not benefit from higher prices overall. They are much more likely to be paid a fair price if they sell to local consumers and local markets, or organise themselves into co-operatives where they can negotiate better prices.

16. If we achieved food sovereignty in the UK, what could we actually eat?

In the UK, we now import 40 per cent of our food, a sharp rise since 20 years ago when the proportion was just 30 per cent.^{xxxvii} In the case of fruit, 90 per cent is imported and the amount of land planted with fruit and vegetables has fallen by one-fifth in the last 15 years.^{xxxviii}

A recent study found that Britain could feed itself through organic farming, if meat consumption was reduced.^{xxxix} There are many indigenous foods that have been neglected but could be produced again and which would actually lead to a more varied, seasonal diet.

However self-sufficiency in UK fruit is hard to achieve year-round and early spring can be a 'hungry gap' for UK-grown fruit and vegetables. Food sovereignty is not opposed to any trade; rather it prioritises local production to meet local need.

17. Can small-scale sustainable farming really provide decent livelihoods for farmers and rural workers?

When producers don't have to pay for expensive seeds and fertiliser, but rely instead on crop diversity and organic techniques, farm productivity tends to increase. When farmers grow their own food this means they need to buy much less, bringing their weekly expenditure down.

But small-scale farming only works effectively with support from the community, sharing knowledge and materials. It also requires a supportive national and international policy environment that ensures the fair sharing of resources and control over distribution.

For example, farmers must be given the platform to sell their produce for a fair price –through farmers markets or cooperatives. By removing the intermediaries' profits and power, farmers can earn more for their produce without increasing the cost to consumers.

18. Wouldn't food sovereignty keep poor communities in poverty and poor countries stuck in agricultural rather than diversified developed economies?

All countries need to feed their populations, and history shows that reliance on imports is a risky way of doing so. Countries in the global south have moved from having large agricultural surpluses fifty years ago, to becoming major importers of cereal and other staples.^{xi} When they are reliant on international markets, they are vulnerable to fluctuating food prices and have to spend valuable foreign exchange on food imports.

Evidence also shows that countries that have developed recently, like South Korea, have done so by improving the revenues from their agricultural sectors and using these to develop other necessary parts of the economy, such as manufacturing.^{xii}

The principles of food sovereignty support self-sufficiency and sustainable agriculture, which is less reliant on expensive imported oil for fuel, the manufacture of fertilisers and the operation of machinery. When more food is produced than is needed for consumption, then food can be exported which provides money to invest in other parts of a country's developing infrastructure and economy.

Food sovereignty involves countries not only producing crops but also diversifying into processing and distributing them. In this way countries or communities can add value to their products or reduce their reliance on other countries or foreign companies for these services.

19. How does food sovereignty work in the longer term when young people want to move to urban centres and go into manufacturing or service sectors?

A lot of urbanisation has been driven by policies that have undermined the viability of rural livelihoods and have driven people into urban poverty. In contrast, food sovereignty is concerned with making the production and distribution of food both socially and environmentally viable. People would no longer be forced to leave their homes in the hope of finding employment in cities. Instead there would be secure, adequately paid and dignified work in the communities in which they grew up.

What would food sovereignty mean for international trade?

20. Isn't international trade beneficial for everyone and essential for countries without enough land or resources to feed their people, and to compensate for poor harvests?

Neoliberal economics suggests that countries should aim to produce high value exports and buy food for the cheapest price available on the international market, which in turn incentivises efficient production. However, recent history has shown that food is too important to be left to the whims of the international markets, which can mean people going hungry if prices rise. While food imports may be necessary to help countries dealing with major disasters, reliance on

food imports to feed a country's population makes that country vulnerable to external shocks.

Competition creates a race to the bottom, fuelling exploitation of workers and the environment. It fails to resolve power imbalances in the food system. Subsidised imports of staple foods into Africa and Latin America frequently undercut local prices, leaving only the larger and corporate farms able to compete.^{xlii} These cheap food imports destroy the market for domestic food and make local food producers poor. Instead, local farmers are employed to grow cash crops in order to earn money to buy the cheap imported food at their local markets. But during the 2008 food crisis, the price rises for staple foods outpaced those for cash crops, leaving farmers unable to feed themselves.^{xliii} Affordable food supplies should also be supported by public policies, such as food reserves, which have often been undermined by structural adjustment.

Trade liberalisation has also forced many farmers leave their land and migrate to the city, leading to a hungry, jobless urban population, a shortage of rural farmers and the loss of valuable traditional farming knowledge.

21. Does food sovereignty imply job losses for farmers and producers who are involved in producing food for international markets, and could it make farmers in the global south poorer?

No. Food sovereignty, unlike the status quo, is fundamentally concerned with social and environmental sustainability. Providing dignified and stable employment is an important aspect of this. Rather than implying job losses, food sovereignty actually implies altering what work is required. By redistributing land to the rural poor and away from a wealthy and powerful minority of land owners, and replacing industrial inputs with manual or human inputs, food sovereignty would increase the number of people being employed in food production.

Furthermore, any changes would need to take place gradually and would be accompanied by support for producers to help ease the transition to a new food production system.

22. Is it consistent to support both Fairtrade and food sovereignty?

It is important to recognise the difference between the Fairtrade labelling schemes and the broader fair trade movement. The Fairtrade labelling schemes work within the existing food system and seek to improve the returns received by producers in developing countries. In recent years Fairtrade has also worked ever more closely with multinational corporations. In this way Fairtrade does not match up with the more radical overhaul of the food system demanded by food sovereignty. However, these schemes have provided an example of how things can be improved within the existing food system and raising awareness of trade and justice issues.

Fair trade as a broader and more radical movement does share considerable common ground with food sovereignty. When it started out, the fair trade movement worked with small-scale farmers that were being excluded from the markets by the big corporations. It aimed to have a more direct and meaningful

relationship with them than was possible for consumers at that time, as well as offering a fairer price for the food.

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