

Mobilising Against the Corporate Hijack of Agriculture and the UN Food Systems Summit

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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The UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), including a ‘pre-summit’, will take place in September 2021 in New York. The Italian government is hosting the pre-summit in Rome from 26–28 July. The UNFSS claims it aims to deliver the latest evidence-based, scientific approaches from around the world, launch a set of fresh commitments through coalitions of action and mobilise new financing and partnerships.

Despite claims of being a ‘people’s summit’ and a ‘solutions’ summit, the UNFSS is facilitating greater corporate concentration, unsustainable globalised value chains and agribusiness leverage over public institutions. As a result, more than 300 global organisations of small-scale food producers, researchers and indigenous peoples [will gather online](#) from 25-28 July to mobilise against the pre-summit.

The Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM) for relations with the United Nations Committee on World Food Security is working to eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition. According to the CMS, the UNFSS – founded on a partnership between the UN and the World Economic Forum (WEF) – is disproportionately influenced by corporate actors, [lacks transparency and accountability](#) and diverts energy and financial resources away from the real solutions needed to tackle the multiple hunger, climate and health crises.

The CMS argues that the UNFSS is not building on the legacy of past world food summits, which resulted in the creation of innovative, inclusive and participatory global food governance mechanisms anchored in human rights, such as the reformed UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Promoting industrial agriculture

It seems the UNFSS is now dominated by corporate front groups and corporate-driven platforms, including the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), the International Agri-Food Network, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the EAT Forum as well as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Gates Foundation. The President of AGRA, Agnes Kalibata, was even appointed as UN Special Envoy for the summit. According to the CMS, those being granted a pivotal role at the UNFSS support industrial food systems that promote ultra-processed foods, deforestation, industrial livestock

production, intensive pesticide use and commodity crop monocultures, all of which cause soil deterioration, water contamination and irreversible impacts on biodiversity and human health.

The industrialised food system that these corporations fuel does not even feed the world, despite corporate claims to the contrary. For example, the 2021 [UN Report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition](#) indicates that the number of chronically undernourished people has risen to 811 million, while almost a third of the world's population has no access to adequate food. Furthermore, the Global South is still reeling from Covid-19 related policies which have laid bare the inherent fragility and injustices of the prevailing food system.

Those who contribute most to world food security, smallholder producers, are the most threatened and affected by the corporate concentration of land, seeds, natural and financial resources and the related privatisation of the commons and public goods.

And these processes are accelerating: the high-tech/data conglomerates, including Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook and Google, [have joined traditional agribusiness giants](#) in a quest to impose a one size fits all type of agriculture and food production on the world. Digitalisation, artificial intelligence and other technologies are serving to promote a new wave of resource grabbing and the restructuring of food systems towards a total concentration of power.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is also heavily involved, whether through [buying up huge tracts of farmland](#), funding and promoting a much-heralded (but failed) 'green revolution' for Africa, pushing [biosynthetic food](#) and [new genetic engineering technologies](#) or more generally [facilitating the aims of the mega agrifood corporations](#).

Under the guise of saving the planet with 'climate-friendly solutions', helping farmers and feeding the world, what Gates and his corporate associates are really doing is desperately trying to repackage the [dispossessive strategies of imperialism](#) wrapped in the language of 'sustainability' and 'inclusivity'.

Through various aspects of data control pertaining to soil quality, consumer preferences, weather, and land use, for example, and e-commerce monopolies, corporate land ownership, seed biopiracy, patents, synthetic food and the undermining of the public sector's role in ensuring food security and national food sovereignty, global agricapital seeks to gain full control over the world's food system.

Smallholder peasant farming is under threat as the big-tech giants and agribusiness impose lab-grown food, genetically engineered (GE) soil microbes, data harvesting tools and drones and other 'disruptive' technologies. The model being promoted desires farmerless industrial-scale farms being manned by driverless machines, monitored by drones and doused with chemicals to produce commodity crops from patented GE seeds for industrial 'biomatter' to be processed and constituted into something resembling food.

The CMS notes that these are false 'solutions' that seek to bypass and undermine the peasant food web which currently produces up to 70% of the world's food, working with only 25% of the resources. Moreover, these false solutions do not address structural injustices such as land and resource grabbing, corporate abuse of power and economic inequality. They merely reinforce them.

Towards food sovereignty

More than 380 million people belong to the movements protesting against the UNFSS. They are [demanding](#) a radical transformation of corporate food regimes towards a just and truly sustainable food system. They are [also demanding](#) increased participation in existing democratic food governance models, such as the UN Committee for World Food Security ([CFS](#)) and its High-Level Panel of Experts. The UNFSS threatens to undermine CFS, which is the foremost inclusive intergovernmental international policy-making arena.

There is an intensifying fight for space between local markets and global markets. The former are the domain of independent producers and small-scale enterprises, whereas global markets are dominated by increasing monopolistic large-scale international retailers, traders and the rapidly growing influential e-commerce companies.

It is therefore essential to protect and strengthen local markets and indigenous, independent small-scale producers and enterprises to ensure community control over food systems, economic independence and local food sovereignty. With this in mind, the CMS is calling for a radical agroecological transformation of food systems based on food sovereignty, gender justice and economic and social justice.

Agroecology is practised throughout the world. As numerous high-level (UN) reports have argued over the years, this approach improves nutrition, reduces poverty, contributes to gender justice, combats climate change and enriches farmland. With no need to purchase proprietary inputs (chemicals, seeds, etc) and its outperforming of industrial agriculture, agroecology represents a shift towards genuine food sovereignty and thus a direct threat to corporate agribusiness.

During the online mobilisation against the pre-summit, participants will share small-scale food producers and workers' realities and their visions for a human rights-based and agroecological transformation of food systems. In doing so, they will highlight the importance of food sovereignty, small-scale sustainable agriculture, traditional knowledge, rights to natural resources and the rights of workers, indigenous peoples, women and future generations.

More information about the online mobilisation from 25-28 July can be found on the [FoodSystems4People website](#).

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Colin Todhunter is an independent writer and analyst specialising in development, food and agriculture based in Europe/India.

He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization.

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About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

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