

World Food Day and the Family Farm: Celebrating the Bedrock of Global Food Production - by Destroying It

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#),
[Environment](#)

World Food Day is coming up on 16 October. This year's theme is 'Family Farming: Feeding the world, caring for the earth'.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's website:

"The 2014 World Food Day theme - Family Farming: "Feeding the world, caring for the earth" - has been chosen to raise the profile of family farming and smallholder farmers. It focuses world attention on the significant role of family farming in eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment, and achieving sustainable development, in particular in rural areas." [1]

Family farming should be celebrated because it really does feed the world. This claim is supported by a 2014 report by GRAIN, which revealed that small farms produce most of the world's food [2].

Around 56% of Russia 's agricultural output comes from family farms which occupy less than 9% of arable land. These farms produce 90% of the country's potatoes, 83% of its vegetables, 55% of its of milk, 39% of its meat and 22% of its cereals [3].

In Brazil, 84% of farms are small and control 24% of the land, yet they produce: 87% of cassava, 69% of beans, 67% of goat milk, 59% of pork, 58% of cow milk, 50% of chickens, 46% of maize, 38% of coffee, 33.8% of rice and 30% of cattle [4].

In Cuba, with 27% of the land, small farmers produce: 98% of fruits, 95% of beans, 80% of maize, 75% of pork, 65% of vegetables, 55% of cow milk, 55% of cattle and 35% of rice [5].

In Ukraine, small farmers operate 16% of agricultural land, but provide 55% of agricultural output, including: 97% of potatoes, 97% of honey, 88% of vegetables, 83% of fruits and berries and 80% of milk [6].

Similar impressive figures are available for Chile, Hungary, Belarus, Romania, Kenya, El Salvador and many other countries.

The evidence shows that small peasant/family farms are the bedrock of global food production. The bad news is that they are squeezed onto less than a quarter of the world's farmland and such land is under threat. The world is fast losing farms and farmers through

the concentration of land into the hands of the rich and powerful.

The report by GRAIN also revealed that small farmers are often much more productive than large corporate farms, despite the latter's access to various expensive technologies. For example, if all of Kenya's farms matched the output of its small farms, the nation's agricultural productivity would double. In Central America, it would nearly triple. In Russia, it would be six fold.

Yet in many places, small farmers are being criminalised, taken to court and even made to disappear when it comes to the struggle for land. They are constantly exposed to systematic expulsion from their land by foreign corporations [7], some of which are fronted by fraudulent individuals who specialise in corrupt deals and practices to rake in enormous profits to the detriment of small farmers and food production [8].

Imagine what small farmers could achieve if they had access to more land and could work in a supportive policy environment, rather than under the siege conditions they too often face. For example, the vast majority of farms in Zimbabwe belong to smallholders and their average farm size has increased as a result of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. Small farmers in the country now produce over 90% of diverse agricultural food crops, while they only provided 60 to 70% of the national food before land redistribution.

Throughout much of the world, however, agricultural land is being taken over by large corporations. GRAIN concludes that, in the last 50 years, 140 million hectares - well more than all the farmland in China - have been taken over for soybean, oil palm, rapeseed and sugar cane alone.

By definition, peasant agriculture prioritises food production for local and national markets as well as for farmers' own families. Big agritech corporations take over scarce fertile land and prioritise commodities or export crops for profit and markets far away that cater for the needs of the affluent. This process impoverishes local communities and brings about food insecurity. The concentration of fertile agricultural land in fewer and fewer hands is therefore directly related to the increasing number of people going hungry every day and is undermining global food security.

The issue of land ownership was also picked up on by another report this year. A report by the Oakland Institute stated that the first years of the 21st century will be remembered for a global land rush of nearly unprecedented scale [9]. An estimated 500 million acres, an area eight times the size of Britain, was reported bought or leased across the developing world between 2000 and 2011, often at the expense of local food security and land rights.

A new generation of institutional investors, including hedge funds, private equity, pension funds and university endowments, is eager to capitalise on global farmland as a new and highly desirable asset class. Financial returns, not food security, are what matter. In the US, for instance, with rising interest from investors and surging land prices, giant pension funds are committing billions to buy agricultural land.

The Oakland Institute argues that the US could experience an unprecedented crisis of retiring farmers over the next 20 years, leading to ample opportunities for these actors to expand their holdings as an estimated 400 million acres changes generational hands.

The corporate consolidation of agriculture is happening as much in Iowa and California as it

is in the Philippines, Mozambique and not least in Ukraine.

As indicated earlier in this piece, Ukraine's small farmers are thriving in terms of delivering impressive outputs, despite being squeezed onto just 16% of arable land. But the US-backed toppling of that country's government may change all that. Indeed, part of the reason behind destabilizing Ukraine was for US agritech concerns like Monsanto to gain access to its agriculture sector, which is what we are now witnessing.

Current 'aid' packages, contingent on austerity reforms, will have a devastating impact on Ukrainians' standard of living and increase poverty in the country [10]. Reforms mandated by the EU-backed loan include agricultural deregulation that is intended to benefit agribusiness corporations. Natural resource and land policy shifts are intended to facilitate the foreign corporate takeover of enormous tracts of land. The EU Association Agreement also includes a clause requiring both parties to cooperate to extend the use of biotechnology. Frederic Mousseau, Policy Director of the Oakland Institute states:

"Their (World Bank and IMF) intent is blatant: to open up foreign markets to Western corporations... The high stakes around control of Ukraine's vast agricultural sector, the world's third largest exporter of corn and fifth largest exporter of wheat, constitute an oft-overlooked critical factor. In recent years, foreign corporations have acquired more than 1.6 million hectares of Ukrainian land."

As World Food Day approaches in celebration of the role of the family farm in feeding the world, from India to Ukraine powerful US agritech corporations continue to colonise agriculture and undermine the continued existence of small farms. This is achieved by various means, including militarism, 'free' trade agreements, commodity market price manipulations, loan/aid packages, the co-optation of political leaders and the hijack of strategic policy-making bodies. As a result, food security and local/regional food sovereignty is being threatened.

Notes

1] <http://www.fao.org/world-food-day/home/en/>

2]

<http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4929-hungry-for-land-small-farmers-feed-the-world-with-less-than-a-quarter-of-all-farmland>

3] Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service, [Russia in Figures 2011](#).

4] Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, "Censo Agropecuario 2006", <http://tinyurl.com/m376s82>

5] Braulio Machin Sosa et al., ANAP-Via Campesina, "Revolución agroecológica, resumen ejecutivo"

6] State Statistics Service of Ukraine. "Main agricultural characteristics of households in rural areas in 2011"

7] http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/2267255/gm_crops_are_driving_genocide_and_ecocide_keep_them_out_of_the_eu.html

8] <http://www.grain.org/article/entries/5048-feeding-the-1-percent>

9] http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OI_Report_Down_on_the_Farm.pdf

10] <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/walking-west-side-world-bank-and-imf-ukraine-conflict>

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