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INSTITUTE FOR FOOD AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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Hunger Grows in America and Around the World. Do Government Leaders Care?

Two alarming documents on hunger and the food crisis were released in November. The USDA reports an alarming increase in food insecurity—fully one in seven Americans do not get enough food throughout the year. And a declaration from the World Summit on Food Security in Rome notes that the world is now hungrier than ever before. The parallels between global and national hunger are staggering.

The increases in food insecurity in the U.S. and abroad have tracked one another almost perfectly. Last year the number of hungry people worldwide increased by 15%, to over 1 billion while U.S. food insecurity increased by 13% with nearly 50 million people without enough food.

The USDA tried to put a positive spin on these disturbing statistics by claiming that “85% of American households were food secure throughout the entire year in 2008, meaning that they had access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.” The question then is, why, in the most productive farming country in the world, do we have so many hungry people? And more importantly, what will our government do about it?

The USDA Report refers to household food shortages, yet there is no shortage of food in the U.S. Families simply come up short when trying to buy food. This disparity is true globally as well, with world production of 1 1/2 times the food needed for every man, woman and child on the planet. There simply is no shortage. In fact the U.S.-global food crisis comes at a time of record global grain harvests coupled with record profits for the world’s global agri-foods corporations with farm suppliers to retailers, Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill, Monsanto, General Food, Wal-Mart all posting windfall profit increases in 2008 of 20 to 86%. For Mosaic, a fertilizer subsidiary of Cargill, profits increased by 1200%.

Many working families in the U.S. are food insecure. Our nation’s food workers, who make up 18% of all U.S. workers, suffer the most egregious food insecurity. Those who pick, process, pack and serve up our food are the lowest-paid workers of any industry and are forced to eat calorie dense, unhealthy diets. This parallels the situation globally, where most of the world’s hungry are poor farmers. In both cases, women and children suffer the most.

The root cause of food insecurity both in the U.S. and globally is a food system that is unjust, unsustainable, inequitable and volatile—controlled by a handful of global monopolies. Unfortunately, the World Food Summit failed to confront them or change the rules. In fact, it failed to do much of anything.

The political will in Rome was so low that not one G-8 country head of state bothered to show up (except for Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi who lives there). In a shocking lack of commitment, the G-8 representatives decided to drop the goal of ending hunger... Now rich countries will only strive to halve hunger by 2015. In fact, the summit resulted in no concrete, quantifiable promises at all. The G8 countries ‘reaffirm and promise to strive, intensify, foster, welcome, and

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The Institute for Food and Development Policy - known as Food First - is a member-supported, nonprofit "peoples' " think tank and education-for-action center. Our work highlights the root causes and value-based solutions to hunger and poverty around the world, with a commitment to establishing food as a fundamental human right.

support efforts at reducing world hunger.' Gone are the promises of \$40 billion a year in agricultural support. And there was no progress in ending financial speculation on food, nor halting land grabs or the expansion of agrofuels...

In the words of Via Campesina, the international peasant federation, the Rome summit was a "total failure." They called upon the people of the world to, "Demand

that our governments allow our full participation in the definition of policies and we expect their full support for this process. They must commit themselves to implement effective policies to eradicate hunger in our societies as quickly as possible."

Given the dark predictions of the USDA's Household Food Security Report, this would seem like good advice for U.S. food movements as well.

World Food Summit Fails to Halt Land Grabbing

by Raphael Grojnowski

Over 1 billion people are not sure where their next meal is going to come from. Yet, many chronically food-insecure countries including Sudan, Ethiopia and Cambodia have already sold nearly 40 million hectares of their best agricultural land to foreign investors, mainly from the Middle East, China and South Korea. Why is the international community not stepping in to avert this neo-colonial scramble for poor countries' arable land?

Sparked by the global food price crisis and supply shortages in the volatile world food markets, wealthy food-deficient countries are responding by buying up vast tracts of land, especially in Africa, in order grow food and fuel long distance. Promises of new technologies, employment and infrastructure to some of the world's most neglected areas have many poor governments jumping through hoops to attract these new investments.

Problematically, these land deals are negotiated in complete secrecy and will have devastating effects for local farmers and their families. There is justified fear that in order to make room for the new foreign mega-farms, smallholder farmers will be dispossessed of their land. In their place, huge monoculture plantations to feed foreign consumers will be established, using industrial farming techniques which have terribly damaging environmental effects, such as the chemical contamination of rural water supplies. The land grabs will inevitably lead to an increase in rural poverty and more people going hungry.

While many peasant organizations are relentlessly trying to draw attention to this potentially devastating land-grabbing trend, the response of the UN has indeed been very slow, as they are facing a problem-

atic double-bind. After decades of calling for investments into developing nations' agriculture, it is difficult for UN agencies to dismiss these foreign investments out of hand, despite acknowledging their potential drawbacks. Too much money is at stake, with investments being estimated at nearly \$100 billion.

At this year's World Food Summit, three UN agencies and the World Bank have finally announced plans to draft a code of conduct for such 'foreign land acquisitions.' Yet similar to their flagging response to the agro-fuel explosion, the draft paper could be too little, too late. The proposed guidelines are only a non-binding and voluntary code, thereby lacking the necessary teeth to force agri-business investors to pursue sustainable and equitable production. With implementation slated for late 2010, unscrupulous investors have another year to make secret deals for prime agricultural real estate overseas.

Although there is no verifiable data yet on the effects of the land grabs, that doesn't make their damaging effects for the local population unforeseeable. At this World Food Summit global leaders failed to set limits on this creeping commercialization of the world's soils and water.

Rather than a firm commitment to the rights of smallholder farmers who produce the vast majority of the world's food and also constitute the vast majority of the world's hungry people, the leading UN food agencies negotiated with private agri-business firms on how to make the land deals work, by 'managing' the huge risks. Only outside the food summit were farmer organizations rallying to stop the corporate control of essential agricultural land, calling for food sovereignty and food systems that actually feed people.

More Emergency Food Aid to California's Heartland

by Zoe Brent

California's most productive agricultural county burned through \$4 million worth of food aid this summer, and Governor Schwarzenegger pledged to extend the aid indefinitely into the winter months. The Fresno County Office of Emergency Services estimates 17,000 people are lining up for food aid each month. Firebaugh City Manager José Antonio Ramirez notes, "Ironically, those most in need are often those who work very hard to put food on our tables—such as farm workers."

The fact that Fresno County is the most profitable agricultural region in the state; bringing in \$4.6 billion a year in crops and livestock according to the American Farmland Trust, only adds an ironic dose of tragedy to this crisis.

Three primary factors contribute to this crisis—drought, the recession, and agribusiness itself. Debate over the degree of influence of each is heating up.

According to the governor, the Fresno Community Food Bank, and the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, the drought is *the* disaster. The estimates of farm job losses due to water shortage range from 6,000¹ to 65,000², and against the backdrop of California's recent water wars, the hunger crisis has been consumed by local water politics.

The Latino Water Coalition has also claimed they are feeling the devastating effects of the drought. However, this group of Latino farmers and growers has been criticized as a front for agribusiness' seeking to profit from higher water quotas. Malcolm MacLachlan of Capitol Weekly revealed in October, "The [Latino] Water Coalition, often described as a grassroots group representing the Latino community, was born in a closed-door meeting of Gov. Schwarzenegger and local officials at Selma City Hall on March 21, 2007—and was 'suggested' by the governor himself, according to a coalition brochure." The New York Times report on the four day "march for water" in April revealed that some farm workers in the sea of signs reading "No water, No

jobs, No food," were paid to march. The United Farm Workers and its co-founder, Dolores Huerta, do not endorse the Coalition.

The second factor is the recession. The San Joaquin Valley has the highest rates of foreclosure in the nation, as well as the largest decline in residential real estate values. The Business Forecasting Center at the University of the Pacific estimates that 47,000 jobs have been lost in the construction industry as a result of the economic downturn.

Perhaps more telling is the history of food insecurity in Fresno County. Rates of food insecurity among low-income adults have remained between 35 and 40% for the past decade.³ It is no secret that farm labor is badly paid and that the primary reasons for food insecurity are economic.

Farm workers like Margarita say, when there *is* work, it is hard and all she can expect to be paid is around \$40 for an entire day picking oranges. With a more historical perspective, Alegría De La Cruz, attorney at the Center for Race Poverty and the Environment, a West Fresno native herself, puts it, "the drought is the biggest spin job the west has ever seen." As a daughter of farm workers, she finds it insulting that after decades of exploitation, the moment water supply is threatened, corporate agribusinesses prop up the image of the starving farm worker crying disaster to court favor for their water agenda, ignoring the fact that their own poor labor conditions have historically been the very reason for high rates of food insecurity among farm workers. Edith Jessup, long time food justice advocate in Fresno puts it another way. Referring to the food aid sent by the governor she says, "it was the right thing for the wrong reasons."

NOTES: 1. Michael, Jeffery, University of the Pacific, Business Forecasting Center. 2009, "Unemployment in the San Joaquin Valley in 2009: Fish or Foreclosure?" 2. Dana Wilkie, CEO, Fresno Community Food Bank, personal interview, Nov. 2009. 3. California Health Interview Survey data, since 2001.



photo by Indybay.org

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I don't have to tell you that times are tough. If you are among the fortunate who can 'spare a dime', please consider a donation now to help Food First dig behind the confusing headlines and publicize exciting innovations in growing and delivering 'local' food in communities here in the U.S. and worldwide.

As we enter a new year, if one of your resolutions is to make a plan that extends beyond your lifetime, please consider designating Food First so that we can continue to advocate for 'food sovereignty'—the right of people to feed themselves.

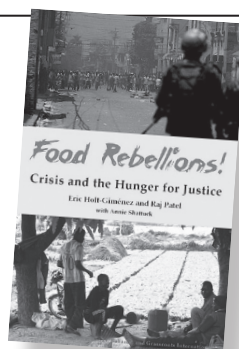
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Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice

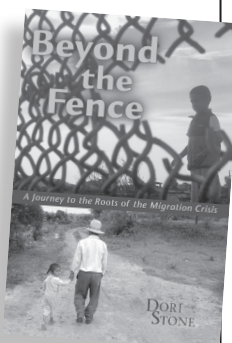
by Eric Holt-Giménez and Raj Patel, with Annie Shattuck. Today there are over a billion hungry people on the planet, more than ever before in history. Why, in a time of record harvests, are a record number of people going hungry? And why are a handful of corporations making record profits? *Food Rebellions!* tells the real story behind the global food crisis and documents the growing trend of grassroots solutions to hunger spreading around the world. Official plans to solve the world food crisis call for more free trade and technical fixes--solutions that have already failed. *Food Rebellions!* is a trail marker on the journey to end hunger and build food sovereignty. \$19.95

To book one of the authors for a college or other community event, contact Martha Katigbak-Fernandez at (510) 654-4400 ext. 221



Beyond the Fence: A Journey to the Roots of the Migration Crisis by Dori Stone, informs the immigration debate in the U.S., which is highly controversial, emotional, and often confusing. She explores migration issues that are largely unnoticed by the public in the U.S. and the mainstream media - the stories and surprising possibilities that get lost in the debate over fences and undocumented migrants exploited at below minimum wage. They are the tales of people's desperation and irretrievable loss, but also

their growing visions of hope. They are the stories of farmers, politicians and activists on both sides of the border. "The book is ideally suited for students, but I can think of few people who would not benefit from reading it." - Angus Wright, author of *The Death of Ramon Gonzales: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma*. *Beyond the Fence*, \$16.95



BOOKS FROM FOOD FIRST

Agrofuels in the Americas edited by Richard Jonasse, explores the impact of agrofuel production in the Global South, where the rural poor and indigenous populations are losing their access to land, and with it, the ability to feed themselves coupled with rising food prices due to the diversion of land to fuel crops.

Authors include Miguel Altieri and Elizabeth Bravo, Eric Holt-Giménez and Isabella Kenfield, Gretchen Gordon and Jessica Aguirre, Richard Jonasse, Maria Luisa Mendonça, Laura Hurtado, Annie Shattuck, and Rachel Smolker and Brian Tokar. \$18.95



Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail

The companion 20-minute documentary DVD, suitable for classroom use, includes a study guide. \$20.00



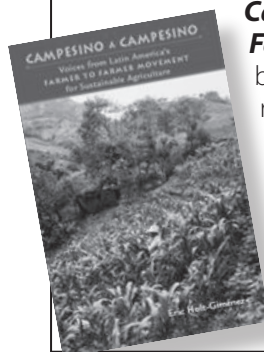
Alternatives to the Peace Corps

edited by Caiti Hachmyer, is the original resource for finding community-based, grassroots volunteer work-the kind of work that changes the world, one person at a time. \$11.95



Campesino a Campesino: Voices from Latin America's Farmer to Farmer Movement for Sustainable Agriculture

by Eric Holt-Giménez, tells the inspiring story of a true grassroots movement: poor peasant farmers teaching one another how to protect their environment while still earning a living. The first book in English about the farmer-led sustainable agriculture movement in Latin America, *Campesino a Campesino* includes lots of first-person stories and commentary from the farmer-teachers, mixing personal accounts with detailed analysis of the political, socioeconomic, and ecological factors that galvanized the movement. \$19.95



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