

Food First NEWS & VIEWS

INSTITUTE FOR FOOD AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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Cuban farmer, Pinar del Río. Photo: Z. Brent

The FAO's *The State of Food and Agriculture 2012* Report

The world's 1 billion smallholder farmers from low and middle-income countries—not governments or corporations—are the biggest investors in agriculture. Even though most of these producers are poor and invest an average of only \$150 per year, they still invest four times more than governments and 50 times more than industry. Their \$170 billion per year investments feed over half the world.

This is the message of the FAO's 2012 annual report, entitled "Investing in agriculture for a better future," released this December in Rome in which the FAO calls for a "farmer-centered" approach to agricultural investment.

"A new investment strategy is needed that puts agricultural producers at its center," said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva. "The challenge is to focus the investments in areas where they can make a difference. This is important to guarantee that investments will result in high economic and social returns and environmental sustainability."

For this to happen, the FAO recommends:

- 1) Governments and their development partners need to help smallholders mobilize their own savings and gain improved access to credit.
- 2) Stronger producer organizations, such as cooperatives, can help smallholders deal with risks and provide better market access.
- 3) Social protection [to] contribute to the expansion of the asset base by the poorest smallholders.

The FAO recognizes that investing in agriculture is essential for poverty and hunger reduction, and that effective agricultural investment strategies need to start with poor farmers. There are many policy and market barriers to farmers' investment, including poverty itself, and the FAO calls on the public sector to create favorable investment conditions for smallholders.

In addition to the generic call to invest in agricultural research, the FAO also recommends that governments and donors prioritize investment in essential public goods in the countryside such as infrastructure, education and health, all of which have "... much higher returns than spending on subsidies for agricultural inputs such as fertilizer." With these statements, the FAO contradicts the "GMOs and fertilizers will save us from hunger" argument. This is not what agribusiness wants to hear.

The FAO's Report also appears to be an informed (and measured) response to the rush of speculative global land grabs parading as "agricultural investment." Director General da Silva has shied away from rejecting

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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 fighting racism and establishing food as a fundamental human right.

"large scale land acquisitions" outright, viewing them as a global reality to be channeled positively, rather than as a scourge to be resisted. The report reminds us that large-scale investments currently being pushed by hedge funds, sovereign wealth funds and private investment companies should be transparent, accountable, socially beneficial and environmentally sustainable. The FAO suggests adoption of the new Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

On one hand, the FAO's numbers highlight the role of smallholders in agricultural investment and reaffirm the farmer's central role in ending poverty and hunger. The notion that creating a positive investment climate that specifically favors smallholders is spot on, and pointing to the need for social investment in the countryside is long overdue.

However, it is disappointing to see the FAO stop short of denouncing land grabs. This amounts to a tacit acceptance of one of the most egregious injustices of our time—one that is dispossessing hundreds of thousands of rural people, pushing them into migration, poverty and hunger. There is simply no evidence (now or historically) that voluntary guidelines for "responsible" or "transparent" land grabs will tame the voracious, rent-seeking appetites of local elites and capital investors. Because governments and development banks are complicit with land grabs, it would be foolhardy for rural and indigenous peoples to assume the state will protect them

from dispossession. Ultimately the success of both the FAO's well-placed proposal for "farmer-centered investment" and the call to regulate land grabs depend upon the strength of social movements to defend

farmers' rights to land, water and seeds. This will create what an advisory agency like the FAO lacks: the political will to change business as usual.

Read the 2012 FAO report. <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/en/>

**Historic Summit of Food
Justice Organizations Held in
Oakland, CA**

By Leah Scrivener

On Saturday, December 8th, the Community Food and Justice Coalition (CFJC) and Food First convened the People's Food Justice Summit in West Oakland, with over 100 community members and activists coming together to discuss the future of the food justice movement. The inspirational day of collaborations set out goals to further the food movement in 2013 and beyond. The summit was the last in a series of year-long actions called Taking Back Our Food System that the CFJC and Food First launched in November 2011.

The Summit began with a discussion to define food justice, building on principles laid out at two food justice gatherings during the past two years: Principles for Food Justice, which was drafted at the recent "Food+Justice=Democracy" conference in Minneapolis, and the Youth Food Bill of Rights that came out of a gathering of youth food justice leaders in Philadelphia two years ago. These two documents affirm the right of all people to produce, access, and eat healthy, sustainable food regardless of their class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability or religion. The documents also highlighted the importance of food sovereignty in local communities—the right of the people to define their own food systems.

Although the Bay Area is host to a myriad of food justice organizations, many of these entities are working separately towards similar goals, having similar conversations at different times. Participants at the Summit discussed

the importance of breaking down barriers and establishing communication and trust among all communities. Food justice organizations shared the challenges of doing neighborhood work and committed to reaching out to youth, faith-based organizations, farmers, farmworkers and community members.

Food First intern Brock Hicks presented the findings of an East Bay Food Justice Consultation conducted by Food First. This project surveyed nearly 30 food justice organizations in the East Bay to identify their successes, needs, goals and obstacles. Based on the feedback of these organizations, he noted that many have similar goals, as well as similar challenges. The survey also identified areas of overlap and neglect such as the low representation of Latino communities in East Bay food justice work. Participants suggested the survey be broadened to include schools, churches and Latino communities for a participatory self-assessment of food justice work in the East Bay.

The organizations analyzed food justice model for social change, which is dominated by projects and foundation funding that tend to pit organizations against each other and makes strategic planning as a movement impossible. The need to build a new model of organizational cooperation for funding and action is an urgent task for the food justice movement in the Bay Area.

In the afternoon, after a hearty lunch of food donated from several local vendors, the group, in a collective visioning exercise, looked forward 10 years to think about what the Bay Area food system should look

like. Then, smaller groups worked to identify actions to achieve those ideals. The groups tackled practical solutions, policy changes, relationship building, promoting a broad culture shift, and developing new resources to fund the

movement. Working groups then identified concrete next steps to further these goals:

- A two-day youth summit in which youth-focused organizations will convene for training, education and relationship building; including refining the Youth Food Bill of Rights;
- Regional collaboration for developing regional food policy calls among food policy councils and other organizations working on policy initiatives;
- Developing Urban Farmer Field Schools for farmers and communities to build practical knowledge and political power by sharing best practices, experiences, concerns and farmer-led research;
- Leveraging resources for sharing information and working collectively to secure funding;
- A shared campaign reflecting something we can all identify with, participate in and support;
- “Branding” the movement in a way that is mindful and cultivates a culture in which everyone can thrive;
- Continuing to build strong personal relationships with each other; convening to bring not only our organizations, but also ourselves into the food movement space, e.g. garden work days, happy hours, story sharing.

The People’s Food Justice Summit was a historic meeting of passionate leaders, producers, healers, educators and artists who agreed to continue collaborating in 2013 and building a regional movement.



Saru Jayaraman, Director of the new Food Labor Research Center at UC Berkeley. Photo: L. Hurtado

UC Berkeley Launches First-Ever Food Labor Research Center

By Leah Scrivener

The Labor Center at the University of California, Berkeley recently held an inaugural reception to celebrate the launch of its newly-formed Food Labor Research Center. Saru Jayaraman, co-founder and co-director of Restaurant Opportunities Center United is the Food Labor Center’s new director. Eric Holt-Giménez, Joanne Lo (executive director of the Food Chain Workers Alliance), Raj Patel and Anna Lappé welcomed Saru.

Saru began the evening by noting that there are many university centers across the country that focus on food research and there are also several centers around the country that focus on labor research and advocacy, but UC Berkeley’s Food Labor Research Center is the first of its kind, focusing on food workers to link labor and food movements.

We eat thanks to food workers who work on farms, in processing

and packing plants and distribution centers and restaurants, as well as supermarkets, big box chains and corner stores.

The Food Labor Research Center is launching at a unique moment, Saru

explained: the Center is emblematic of the ways that the food and labor movements have been gaining energy and establishing common ground in recent years.

What do these two movements have common? The 20 million workers in the U.S. food industry (one-sixth of the nation's workforce) are the fastest-growing business sector. Eric Holt-Giménez noted that food workers are pivotal for the food movement, as they are the poorest segment in the US and the most likely to be food insecure. Food workers are now organizing more and more as food justice activists, and in doing so, are raising their voices to add a critical labor perspective to the food movement.

Saru introduced her forthcoming book *Behind the Kitchen Door* (<http://behindthekitchendoor.org/>), to be released on February 13th, 2013. It features stories of restaurant workers across the US, using data collected over the past decade, and revealing the struggles of restaurant workers, who often do not earn a living wage, have healthcare or paid sick days. The federal minimum wage for tipped workers has remained frozen at \$2.13 per hour since 1991, thanks to heavy lobbying by the National Restaurant Association.

The Food Labor Research Center has already collaborated with the Food Chain Workers Alliance and Restaurant Opportunities

Center to release two reports, *The Hands That Feed Us* (<http://foodchainworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Hands-That-Feed-Us-Report.pdf>), and *A Dime a Day* (http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/foodlaborresearch/price_food12.pdf).

The Food Labor Research Center represents an exciting step towards convergence between the labor and food movements. Food First looks forward to future collaboration.

Read more about the Center's launch and view photos of the launch celebration. <http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/foodlaborresearch/launch.html>

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