

Food First NEWS & VIEWS

INSTITUTE FOR FOOD AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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Basque participants at Swanton Berry Farms, California's only unionized organic farm

in 2010, Food First's Food Sovereignty Tours program has led two trips to the Basque Country, where farmers' union EHNE-Bizkaia has taught us about their unique history, culture, food traditions and innovative work advancing food sovereignty (See "Food Sovereignty in Practice in the Basque Country" Food First Backgrounder, Fall 2013).

This September, we had the opportunity to invite our Basque partners to learn about food justice in the San Francisco Bay Area.

We began in Oakland where we met David Hilliard, former Chief of Staff of the Black Panthers, who helped us trace the roots of food justice and the city's social movement history. We visited People's Grocery and Dig Deep farms, farmers' markets, and business incubator programs La Cocina and the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA). We talked about agroecology with professors Miguel Altieri and Clara Nicholls at the University of California Berkeley; movement-building with Gerardo Marin of Rooted in Community; and public organic waste processing with Andy Schnieder at the City of Berkeley waste transfer site. We visited Swanton Berry farm one morning; spent the afternoon at the Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS) chatting with farm apprentices about their training program; and finished the day at Life Lab learning about garden-based education. After most of the visits our hosts would pull me aside and tell me that this group had some of the best questions and was the most curious of any group they had ever hosted.

This tour reminded me of the vast array of food-focused non-profits, private enterprises, public programs and community-based organizations in California that all play a part in our "food movement." It also reminded me of the importance and

Food First Hosts Basque Farmers for Bay Area Food Justice Tour

*By Zoe Brent,
Food First fellow and Tour Coordinator*

After a long day of farm visits in Santa Cruz, CA, we sat on the cliff with sandwiches taking in the view as the fourth day of our Food Justice Tour came to a close. As with every day, this one was filled with intensely political and intellectual conversation, insightful questions and meaningful exchanges with the group of 13 Basque farmers and food activists I had the honor of traveling with. Since its founding



Basques on the Black Panthers History Tour with David Hilliard, tracing the roots of the Food Justice movement in Oakland

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CONTRIBUTORS

Alberto Alonso-Fradejas, Corey Blant,
Christina Bronsing, Christopher Cook,
Giorgio Cingolani, Jennifer Franco, Eva Holt-
Rusmore, Ayumi Kinezuka, Ashley Pinkerton,
Leah Scrivener, Chunyu Wang, Yi Wang,
Charles Wolinsky and Yvonne Yen Liu

INTERNS

Raffi Greenberg, Brock Hicks, Lauren
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VOLUNTEER TRANSLATORS

Flora Chabane, Elena Chen, Gabriela
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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.



Professor Miguel Altieri gives an overview of the Gill Tract in Albany, where students and community members of "Occupy the Farm" are fighting to save the land for urban sustainable agriculture research

the challenge of ideologically preparing for this work, if this food movement is to build the political power necessary to achieve real food system transformation. And finally, this tour reminded me that we must know how to laugh and find fun along the way.

As we sat in the chilly coastal wind one night, we watched three members of our Basque group brave the California waves, eager to seize every possible moment to experience the Golden State in our six short, but densely packed, days together. I was inspired by the Basques' depth of analysis and commitment to food sovereignty, but also impressed with their ability to have fun—and sing!—along the way.

This Land is Our Land?

By Bob St. Peter and Raj Patel¹

Imagine a country where ideologues bent on land reform turn agriculture into the plaything of the world's richest investors, and poor local farmers are locked out of millions of acres prime agricultural land. Then stop imagining some African country

1. Bob St. Peter is a farmer and founding member of Food for Maine's Future, a grassroots organization working to build a sustainable and democratic food system in Maine. Raj Patel is an author, activist and Food First fellow. This article is an excerpt, reprinted with permission, from *Civil Eats*.

run by a despot and his friends and start picturing the United States. Rural America is on the cusp of one of the greatest transfers of land in its history and no one's talking about it.

At its worst, land reform lets plutocrats kick poor people off their ancestral land. But land reform is not only the tool of dictators. At its best, sensible policies about how land is used, transferred, and owned can make it possible for young people to farm with dignity, a living wage, and a future. It can help poor people stop being poor. It can let young farmers who want to farm break through the barriers to entry. It can provide a secure retirement for America's older farmers. It can happen and should happen in countries as democratic and as rich as the United States.

In fact, radical reform has been discussed in the U.S. and recently. But not in the current agricultural policy centerpiece: The Farm Bill. If you knew nothing about it, you might think that the Farm Bill would be a sensible place for talking about farms and bills. But big, structural problems like land use, transfer, ownership, and preservation are too big a threat to the status quo to mention—so no one risks talking about them.

Certainly, land reform is a ticklish subject. In its cartoon version, land reform is what communists do after a revolution. Few in Congress want to be associated with it. That's a shame, because historical American-facilitated land reforms have often been very successful. The prosperity of Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan owe much to the reforms imposed on them by the U.S. after WWII in order to preempt the spread of communism.

Land reform isn't of mere historical interest—it remains important within America. Just as in the Global South,

poor people in the U.S. still want and try to make a living off the land. While some farmers' children want to head to the cities, many others are being kicked off the farm. No matter how enthusiastic and able they are, they can't afford to stay, the farm can't feed another mouth.

To the ranks of these unwilling urbanites, add a generation of young city-dwellers raring to get their hands dirty. The food movement has rekindled young Americans' romance with agriculture. Thousands graduate from dozens of new food and sustainable agriculture programs. They're hardly naïve about the work involved in living off the land. Yet their ambition will be fruitless, because unless they come from families of good fortune, they won't be able to afford the land, they will be priced out of the market by institutional investors and large-scale farm operations...

The trouble is that there are few tables around which the conversation might begin, and none of them are at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The closest the U.S. government has come are a few tokens of support for beginning farmers, most of which have been stripped out before the new Farm Bill emerged from committee.

Ultimately, the Farm Bill assumes that every small farmer wants to become a specialty producer selling to restaurants. But what about those farmers who want to feed their local schools, elder-care facilities, Head Start programs, or homeless shelters? The Farm Bill may contain multitudes, but it can't contain this.

In any case, a land reform conversation is bigger than the purview of the Department of Agriculture. There's no simple policy

to address this. But it's possible to imagine a set of ideas that 1) allow a new generation of landless Americans to steward the land for the public good; 2) build a vibrant and productive rural economy; and 3) make rural retirement possible without poverty. At a minimum, these would involve:

- Ceilings on maximum acreage on agricultural land ownership;
- Conservation easement legislation to guarantee that small farmland remains in production and under small-farm ownership;
- Student debt forgiveness in exchange for farming;
- Farmworkers' right to organize and to living wages;
- Investment in rural healthcare infrastructure;
- Financially secure retirement options for rural elders; and
- Support for the agroecological farming needed for 21st century agriculture.

These were ideas that were part of a national conversation forty one years ago at the First National Conference on Land Reform, which took place in April 1972 in San Francisco, bringing together representatives of the Inter-Religious Coalition on Housing, the NAACP, Friends of the Earth, and dozens of other organizations.

They knew what we know now: That progressive land reform in the United States could address a range of environmental and social problems, encouraging sustainable climate-change ready farming, providing (literally) green jobs, and reimagining rural America.

To read the full article, visit: <http://civileats.com/2013/10/18/this-land-is-our-land/>

A Note from the Executive Director

Thank you so very much for working with us to end the injustices that cause hunger this year. Your generous support allows Food First to take a strong, independent stance on the issues and to engage boldly on the front lines of the food movement. In 2013, your support allowed us to strengthen our ties with Vía Campesina, the international coalition of 200 million peasants. With them, we promote food sovereignty, agroecology and the public ownership of seeds.

Following our exiting conference "Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue," held at Yale this September, we look forward to building our action-research network of academics and activists in 2014. We'll be researching land, seed and food struggles in North and South America, in urban as well as rural areas. We'll also continue our agroecological development work with the farmers of the Campesino a Campesino movement in Latin America and will establish the U.S.'s very first Urban Farmer Field School with underserved communities where we live, in the San Francisco East Bay. We have also been hard at work redesigning our website to make it a more effective tool for research, education and advocacy. We look forward to launching the new site in January 2014 and to hearing your feedback.

I hope we can count on your continuing support as we work with the movements, communities, policy-makers and researchers who are transforming the food system. We simply couldn't do this work without you.



Eric Holt-Giménez
Executive Director

Updates
from Food First

COMING SOON!

Food First launches our new and improved website! Visit us in January and let us know what you think!

www.foodfirst.org

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www.foodsovereigntytrips.org

BASQUE COUNTRY: Food Sovereignty and Cooperative Production, March 22 - 30, 2014



GRABBING POWER:

The New Struggles for Land, Food and Democracy in Northern Honduras
By Tanya M. Kerksen, with a Foreword by Eric Holt-Giménez

This is the first of a series of Food First books on Land & Sovereignty. *Grabbing Power* unravels the history of agribusiness in Northern Honduras, from the United Fruit Company's dominance in the early 20th century to the rise of ruthless landowner Miguel Facussé, the "oil palm grower of death."

In the face of rising landlessness and mounting repression, especially since the 2009 coup, peasant families in the Aguán Valley of Honduras have formed an impressive social movement to reclaim their lands, build food sovereignty and create genuine democracy in Honduras.

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398 60TH STREET • OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94618 USA • TEL: (510) 654-4400 • EMAIL FOODFIRST@FOODFIRST.ORG

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