

# Food First NEWS & VIEWS

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Photo by Sophia Turrell

*Kick-off event for the Oakland Food Policy Council held in March 2009.*

## Building Neighborhood Food Systems in the East Bay: The Oakland Food Policy Council is off to a good start

While the Oakland Food Policy Council (OFPC) was established 2008, its seeds were sown in 2005 when the Oakland Mayor's Office of Sustainability commissioned a study on the Oakland food system. The report, the Food Systems Assessment for Oakland, CA, made several innovative recommendations. Among them was a recommendation to create a food policy council to review the food system from production through waste management, and develop ideas to make the food system equitable and sustainable. In December 2006, the Oakland City Council Life Enrichment Committee unanimously passed a resolution to allocate start-up funding for the OFPC. Throughout 2007 and early 2008 a dedicated group of Oakland citizens, organizations, and City of Oakland Department of Human Services staff worked to identify a home for the OFPC and, in May 2008, Food First was selected to incubate the council.

In its first year the fledgling council has developed considerably. Between May and October of 2008 Food First set the scene for the council, securing funding and putting other basic systems in place, so that when the OFPC Coordinator Alethea Harper started work in October, she was able to dive right in to the development of the council.

Accomplishments so far include launching the OFPC website and listserv; building partnerships with allied organizations in Oakland including the HOPE Collaborative and PUEBLO; researching the structure and activities of existing food policy councils across the continent; speaking at several food justice events in Northern California; presenting to graduate classes at UC Berkeley; holding a kick-off event for the OFPC

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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.

featuring speakers from across the food system; developing requirements and an application for OFPC membership; forming a Development Committee to select the first class of OFPC members; and recruiting prospective OFPC members.

With food systems work gaining momentum here in Oakland and across the country, and with the inequalities in our current system becoming more glaringly obvious with each passing month, there is a strong feeling within the Oakland community that now is the perfect time to be convening the OFPC. In March of 2009 the OFPC held its first official event—a kick-off meeting attended by more than 80 people. Attendees came from many corners of Oakland: City Council, businesses, nonprofits, community-based organizations, and City and County staff, and included many of the people who were instrumental in making the OFPC possible. Each of the event’s speakers and many other attendees expressed their ongoing commitment to launching the OFPC and creating an equitable and sustainable food system. East Bay Pictures International, the production company behind the Edible City documentary, filmed the event.

Building on the momentum established by the kick-off event, the OFPC Development Committee was formed in April and May 2009. This committee is made up of representatives of each of the “working communities” that will be represented on the council: the business community; labor community; community organizations and citizens; rural and regional businesses and organizations; health and education organizations; and local governance. Some committee members have been involved with the OFPC’s formation from the very beginning, and some bring needed expertise that had been missing from the conversation. The Development Committee will be responsible for selecting the first class of OFPC members, and ensuring that the OFPC is balanced across “working communities,” food system sectors, age,

gender, and ethnicity, so that the council as a whole will possess the wisdom and experience needed to analyze the food system in its entirety and devise creative solutions for an equitable and sustainable Oakland food system.

In addition to supporting the launch of the OFPC, Food First is working on three reports that will help guide and inform the new council in its first years of operation. These reports include: Food System Meta-Analysis for the San Francisco Bay Area (produced in partnership with Public Health Law & Policy, or PHLP), a review of all food system assessments developed for the Bay Area; Oakland Food Retail Impact Study (with PHLP), which includes a “framework” for evaluating different styles of food retail; and Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned (produced in partnership with the Community Food Security Coalition), which examines the structure, activities, strengths and weaknesses of existing food policy councils.

The first class of OFPC members will be announced in late summer 2009. Over the next few months, the newly seated OFPC members will get to know each other, become familiar with current research on the Oakland food system, reach out to the community for input, develop partnerships with interested citizens and youth, and develop a strategic plan for transforming the Oakland food system.



Visit the Oakland Food Policy Council website at <http://www.oaklandfood.org>

Sign up for the OFPC listserv at <http://www.groups.google.com/group/ofpc-announcements>

The World Food Prize was recently awarded to an Ethiopian scientist for his work breeding corn for resistance to Striga—a parasitic weed that causes significant crop losses for African farmers. These new Striga-resistant seeds should be on shelves in the coming year. But, as far back as 15 years ago, Kenyan farmers developed their own solution to Striga—one that also provides fertility, animal fodder, helps conserve precious irrigation water, and provides resistance to another major African pest—the stemborer.

Dubbed “the push-pull system,” this process takes advantage of the natural relationship between plants and insects. It is a novel system of integrated pest management (IPM), exploiting the forces of attraction and offering a wide range of benefits to farmers and their land. It also offers major economic benefits to farmers—first in not requiring purchase of genetically modified seeds and, second, in increasing yields dramatically.

The development of push-pull planting took off in 1994 when the Kenya-based International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) and Rothamsted Research in the UK, funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, dedicated participatory research programs to finding the most effective “push” and “pull” crops. These crops would control insect populations by acting to either trap or repel insects—a sustainable alternative to using harmful pesticides. Trials confirmed that Napier grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*) had potential as the perfect “pull,” and both molasses grass (*Melinis minutiflora*) and Desmodium (*Desmodium uncinatum*) could serve as the perfect “push.”

The first trial plots—which had a carefully selected combination of Napier and Desmodium planted around and among maize (corn)—offered extraordinary results. The trial plots had a major increase in yields and a significant decrease in stemborer and Striga damage. The results proved that push-pull practices could allow small farmers to increase yields without adding

## ECOLOGICAL PUSH-PULL SYSTEM RESISTS PARASITIC WEED, STRIGA, IN AFRICAN CORN FIELDS

expensive and harmful herbicides and pesticides—a much healthier and economical approach to pest management.

By 2005, more than 4,000 farmers were practicing push-pull in Kenya. Most farmers who have adopted the system have not only experienced impressive 30-100 percent yield increases, but have also increased food security and added income, improved soil fertility and now have a reliable source of good cattle feed (Napier grass and Desmodium). Desmodium fixes nitrogen for added soil fertility. Knowledge of the technology has spread through sub-Saharan Africa by means of town meetings, national radio broadcast, and farmer-teacher programs. In all trial areas, ICIPE technicians and Ministry of Agriculture staff are available to keep track of progress.

By 2009 12,000 African farmers were using this system, with a goal of 40,000 families by 2010.

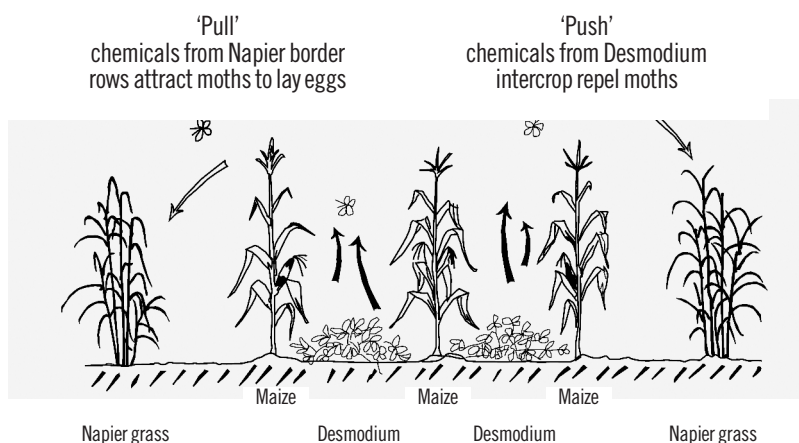
The difference between this approach and the exclusively genetic approach of the Green Revolution is that the push-

pull system relies on farmers’ knowledge and labor rather than genetically modified seeds and agrochemicals that can be packaged and sold. Push-pull has empowered farmers to become self-sufficient through a natural and income-generating practice. It proves that there is a future for sustainable practices that respect environmental impacts.

This October the US-based Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) will present its first annual Food Sovereignty Prize to recognize such contributions to sustainable agriculture. Eligible candidates for the prize include groups or organizations that have made contributions to food justice, sustainable practices, and a democratically controlled food system. The recipient will be chosen by a panel of CFSC committee members, and recognized at CFSC’s 13th Annual Conference, to be held October 10-13 in Des Moines, Iowa.

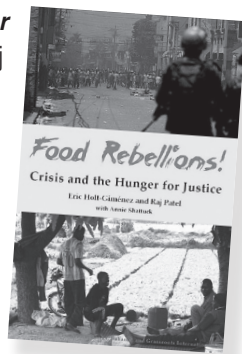
The researchers and farmers who have developed the push-pull system and contributed to its success are certainly worthy of a Food Sovereignty nomination. Their work represents the healthy and sustainable balance between science and agriculture. Push-pull is a real contribution to sustainable practices and has potential to transform food systems throughout the world.

For a more detailed report by The Gatsby Foundation titled *The Quiet Revolution: Push-Pull Technology and the African Farmer*, 2005. [http://www.push-pull.net/Gatsby\\_paper.pdf](http://www.push-pull.net/Gatsby_paper.pdf) and ‘PUSH-PULL’ technology for the control of striga weed and stemborers in Africa, <http://push-pull.net/index.shtml>

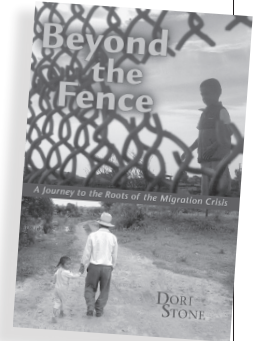




**Food Rebellions: Crisis and the Hunger for Justice**, by Eric Holt-Giménez and Raj Patel, with Annie Shattuck, discusses the implications of increasing consolidation of agricultural lands in the hands of a few agribusiness brands that are developing ever more toxic high tech solutions to a crisis that they invented. The real path to truly addressing rising hunger is through re-regulating the market, reducing the power of the agri-foods industrial complex, and building ecologically resilient family agriculture. \$19.95.



**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.

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

## NEW 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

“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 Gonzalez: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma*. \$16.95

**Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail** is the companion 20-minute documentary DVD, suitable for classroom use, includes a study guide. \$20.00.



To order these and other Food First books, go to [www.foodfirst.org](http://www.foodfirst.org) or call us at 510-654-4400 x232.

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