

# Land & Sovereignty in the Americas Activist-Researcher Collective

A global wave of land grabs is concentrating farmland and other food producing resources in the hands of a few, with serious consequences for both rural and urban communities, especially small farmers, fishers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, women and communities of color. While the challenges are formidable, a growing number of people across the Americas—from Detroit to Oakland, Guatemala to Argentina—are engaging in proactive struggles to rebuild local economies and food systems. Building on a voluntary network of such committed people, the Land & Sovereignty in the Americas Collective seeks strengthen alliances among these creative struggles; make them visible through popular publications and media outreach; and in doing so broaden support for struggles for right to the land that feeds us all.



Photo by Caracol Producciones

In the last few years, most media coverage has focused on the role of hedge funds, sovereign wealth, and “new colonialist” purchases of land in Africa and Asia. However, there is evidence that land grabs in the Americas are occurring under a different set of dynamics and “to an extent wider than previously assumed.” Land grabs in the Americas—both North and South, rural and urban—are occurring in areas of longstanding inequity, racism and conflict. They involve real estate speculation, mining, biofuel production, industrial forestry, corporate tourism complexes, gentrification and displacement of historically working class neighborhoods. These patterns of dispossession are potentially devastating for marginalized communities.



“The land belongs to everyone.” Photo by Zoe Brent

The responses to land grabs—scholarly papers, media reports, place-based resistance and global campaigns—have helped to bring the issue to public attention. But as the multiple forms of land grabs advancing around the world increasingly come to light, it is becoming clear that these efforts are not enough. Reversing the trend in land grabs requires a broad-based response from underserved communities and the broader public. This needs to be supported by solid research and analysis, produced and disseminated by activists and researchers embedded in the very struggles to access and defend land for community livelihoods and sustainable food production.

As part of our mission to end the injustices that cause hunger, Food First gave plenary presentations at the first International Conference on Global Land Grabbing at the University of Sussex in 2011 and at the Second International Conference on Global Land Grabbing at Cornell University in 2012. Following these conferences we realized that to understand and stop land grabs activists and researchers needed to work together in a more systematic way. In June of 2012, Food First convened a two-day colloquium in Oakland, CA. At this meeting, over a dozen community activists and activist-researchers shared experiences and observations about the recent onslaught of corporate land investments that are displacing families and communities, degrading the environment, and undermining the sustainable production of local food. With gripping examples from Maine to Los Angeles and Guatemala to Brazil, the significance of this gathering was clear. The group established itself as the Land & Sovereignty in the Americas Collective and has maintained contact and grown over the past two years. As coordinator of the Collective, Food First has facilitated a number of subsequent meetings and webinars, and begun publishing a series of books and Issue Briefs to highlight specific themes and struggles and raise public awareness.

One book and five Issue Briefs have thus far been published (see box). With a modest influx of resources, we hope to consolidate the Collective via regular web conferences and additional Issue Briefs, leading up to the production of an edited book on "Land Grabs in North America" produced by the Collective with editorial coordination from Food First.

For all activist, researcher and media inquiries regarding Land & Sovereignty, please contact [land@foodfirst.org](mailto:land@foodfirst.org).

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<http://foodfirst.org/support-land-and-sovereignty>

## Land & Sovereignty in the Americas Publications

*Grabbing Power: The new struggles for land, food and democracy in Northern Honduras* by Tanya M. Kerksen  
<http://foodfirst.org/publication/grabbingpower/>

"Sons and Daughters of the Earth: Indigenous communities and land grabs in Guatemala" Issue Brief No.1 by Alberto Alonso-Fradejas <http://foodfirst.org/publication/sons-and-daughters-of-the-earth-indigenous-communities-and-land-grabs-in-guatemala/>

"Governing the Global Land Grab: Competing political tendencies" Issue Brief No. 2 by Jun Borrás, Jennifer Franco and Chunyu Wang <http://foodfirst.org/publication/governing-the-global-land-grab-competing-political-tendencies/>

"The Great Soy Expansion: Brazilian land grabs in Eastern Bolivia" Issue Brief No. 3 by Miguel Urioste <http://foodfirst.org/publication/the-great-soy-expansion-brazilian-land-grabs-in-eastern-bolivia/>

"Land Conflicts in Argentina: From resistance to systemic transformation" Issue Brief No. 4 by Zoe Brent <http://foodfirst.org/publication/land-conflicts-in-argentina-from-resistance-to-systemic-transformation/>

"Farmland Meets Finance: Is land the new economic bubble?" Issue Brief No. 5 by Madeleine Fairbairn <http://foodfirst.org/publication/farmland-meets-finance/>



Photo by Manuel Morillo