

A Tale of Two Food Prizes

*By Eric Holt-Giménez, PhD.
Executive Director, Food First*

On October 14th in Des Moines, Iowa, the Food Sovereignty Prize was awarded to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, run by African-American farmers of the southern United States and to OFRANEH—the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña).

The next day, hundreds of distinguished international guests gathered in Des Moines, Iowa as Sir Fazle Hasan Abed accepted the World Food Prize in the name of BRAC—the world's largest non-governmental rural development agency.



Ben Burkett, State Coordinator of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Mississippi Field Office. From <http://foodsovereigntyprize.org>.

Both prizes were awarded in recognition of their fight against hunger. That's where the similarity ends and the lesson begins.

The World Food Prize typically celebrates technological innovations that increase agricultural yields. This is because the award committee assumes there isn't enough food to go around.

Actually, at the height of the global food crises of 2008 and 2011, the world saw record-breaking grain harvests (and record profits) at the same time a record 1.2 billion people went hungry because they were too poor to buy food.

Awarding the World Food Prize to BRAC—an anti-poverty organization—should be a reminder that poverty, not scarcity, is the main cause of world hunger.

The destitute farmers producing over half the world's food—primarily peasant women—make up most of the world's hungry. They need more land, more water and a larger share of the food dollar. But despite the BRAC award, the World Food Prize understands hunger and poverty in terms of scarcity, not resource distribution. The Prize is always awarded for the same thing: growth. Growth in production, growth in commercial inputs, growth in credit, growth of global markets...

This obsession ignores the problems of inequitable distribution, exploitation and the growing disparity of wealth. Eighty-four individuals now own as much wealth as half of the world's population. The growing wealth gap—not scarcity—is causing hunger. It is easy to talk about baking an ever bigger pie. It's much harder to talk about who gets the biggest piece, or who gets to cut the pie.

The Food Sovereignty Prize is, in many ways, the antithesis of the World Food Prize. It has a shorter history

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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.

(and infinitely smaller budget). This year's laureates were chosen for their steadfast commitment to human rights and their historical resistance of oppression.

One of the awardees, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, has worked for four decades across 16 southern states promoting Black and family owned farms, co-ops, training in sustainable agriculture, forestry, management and marketing, and has advocated for the rights of Black farmers and defended them against the trend in Black land ownership that has gone from a peak of 14% to less than 1% of agricultural land in the United States.

Honduran co-prize winner OFRANEH came together in 1978 to protect the territories and human rights of the Garifuna people of Honduras' Atlantic coast. Their traditional lands are being grabbed by oil palm plantations and tourism developments.

The World Food Prize provides optimistic tales of grassroots capitalism. The Food Sovereignty Prize is a David vs Goliath resistance story about hope against all odds. One prizes entrepreneurial "empowerment" within the existing system, the other is about political power and changing how resources are allocated.

For the vast majority of the world's farmers, BRAC's successes are the exception rather than the rule. The default is land grabs, racism, hunger, institutionalized violence and climate disasters—the daily reality of the farmer and fisher families of OFRANEH and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives.

BRAC's successes should be celebrated. But this shouldn't blind us to the harsh realities of a food system that prevents most farmers from accessing the co-ops, micro-credit, training and services promoted by BRAC. Unless "empowerment" protects farmers from the waves of dispossession and climate chaos resulting from the spread of industrial

agriculture in the name of ending hunger, even these gains will be lost.

Economic growth without redistribution of power and wealth ultimately reinforces the existing systems of exploitation. Without political control over land, water and markets—without food sovereignty—rural people will be a tourist development or an oil palm plantation away from hunger.

What's in a prize? A tale of two paradigms and the difference between optimism and hope, between food security and food sovereignty—between the *status quo* and the end of hunger.

How to Work Together: Food Justice in Our Community

By Katie Mott, Food First Intern

Food First's September event at La Peña featured a dialogue on the future of the food justice movement in the Bay Area with Shanti Prasad, Lydia Gans, and Brahm Ahmadi.

The three panelists work in different parts of the food movement, but have much in common. Each organization faces challenges in building capacity and moving forward. Shanti Prasad, the Community Mobilization Coordinator for the Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB), finds that many people do not feel skilled or educated enough to participate in civic engagement. People are often hesitant to partake in events because they think they know nothing about policies or activism.

Whether it be lobbying on "Hunger Action Day" in May, or sitting outside the Alameda City Council until the Food Bank was given adequate space, Prasad has encouraged people

to get involved in the larger food movement. The Speak Up Project ('SUP!'), ACCFB's newest effort, begins in October and consists of six workshops. The workshops will teach people how to advocate and will help instill the confidence to succeed as leaders in the food movement. These workshops are open to everyone and require no experience.

Lydia Gans from the nationwide Food Not Bombs movement said that just in the Bay Area, Food Not Bombs has been arrested over 700 times since 1992 for protesting war and poverty by sharing food. Law enforcement has attempted to shut them down all over the United States. Still, Food Not Bombs sticks to their nonviolent approach. The organization relies on donated food, free places to cook, and people who love what they're doing to support them all along the way. While their trucks sometimes need a few repairs, Food Not Bombs has created workable delivery systems for a cause they're passionate about.

For Brahm Ahmadi, food activist and co-founder of People's Grocery, building a movement-based business faces many challenges, including raising capital, inflated property prices and creating a strong foundation in the community.

Ahmadi believes that a lot of these issues come from the lack of meaningful support from Oakland city leaders. Without people pressure to create political will, not much can be accomplished. Further, the Bay Area's housing market is out of control. "If we had a bigger movement that was very vocal and angry, I think all of those barriers could be removed much more easily," said Ahmadi.

Host Eric Holt-Giménez changed the pace of the conversation by asking how all three of these efforts

could come together and coordinate so that everybody is able to access healthy food.

Ahmadi once again hit the nail on the head, saying, "I don't think we know how to work together."

He went on to explain how building a sustained, comprehensive movement is hard when it's typically on the shoulders of the organizations already working so hard on the ground to do it.

With time, effort and funding spread very thin across the entire Bay Area, it's incredibly difficult to try to come together to share ideas. Ahmadi mentioned the need for an entirely separate charity sector that funds work and gets a portion of the taxpayer's money to sustain these efforts.

"We predominantly rely on non-profits to build movements and it

doesn't seem to work," said Ahmadi.

There's a demand for a new form of organization in the food movement so that different institutions can work together. In the past, this role fell to the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) that brought hundreds of food movement organizations together. The CFSC ensured the continuation of federal food assistance projects, found funding for community food projects from the USDA, and influenced legislation in Washington D.C.. Unfortunately, the CFSC disbanded in 2012 and since then funders have lost the political will to reconstruct the coalition. A new coalition, Rise Together, was founded a year after the fall of the CFSC and already has over 160 partners throughout the Bay Area. Coalitions such as these and the capacity to work together are definitely needed to build a more healthy, just and sustainable food system.

Food First 40th Anniversary Gala

By Brian Perlmutter, Food First Volunteer



Food First Executive Director welcoming guests at Food First's 40th anniversary gala.

The night of October 16th, 150 friends, supporters, fellows and board members of Food First gathered to celebrate its rich history and groundbreaking work that has been instrumental in the spread of the Food Sovereignty and Food Justice movements worldwide. The evening kicked off with music from *Nuevo Mundo* and dinner by Just Delicious. The artist Jennifer Johns hosted the event and delighted the audience with her *a cappella* performance. This was followed by stunning spoken

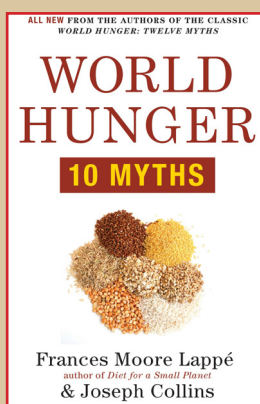
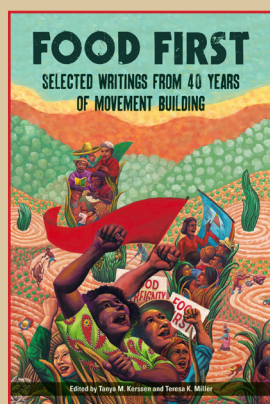
word poetry by Aaron Cadiz of Youth Speaks and Tassiana Williams of Brave New Voices who recounted how the corporate food industry brings disease and heart-break into their lives.

Food First Executive Director, Eric Holt-Giménez, gave an inspiring speech recounting how the organization's original mission of "Ending the injustices that cause hunger" has guided the research, political initiatives and alliances with those

for whom giving up hope is not an option. This was followed by words from Frances Moore Lappé, co-founder of Food First and author of foundational books such as *Diet for a Small Planet* and *World Hunger 10 Myths*. "Frankie" celebrated the way Food First has opened routes many actors in the growing food movement now follow. She pointed out that the right wing in the US generously supported their think tanks and as progressives we should do the same. Those gathered also

heard from Chivy Sok, Cambodian refugee and co-director of the Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), who recognized Food First's commitment to the most vulnerable in our current food system and for keeping hope for a fair food system alive. The night concluded with Food First fellow Raj Patel's impassioned pitch for everyone to continue to support the nation's most established "people's think tank."

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Food First is pleased to welcome Ana C. Galvis-Martinez to our team. She joined us in September 2015 to oversee communications,

social media, publications and the web page. Ana holds a bachelor's degree in Biology, a Master's in Sustainable Development and a Master's in Latin American Studies with an emphasis on food justice.

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