

The Politics of Food: The More Things Stay the Same, the More They Change

By Eric Holt-Giménez



After four decades of working to end the injustices that cause hunger, the tide is finally turning. As the nation's first think tank on food, Food First is both hopeful and humbled by the growing wave of public concern on food issues and by the rise of exciting social movements for food justice, food sovereignty, and food democracy.

When *Diet for a Small Planet* by Frances Moore Lappé came out in 1971 it was revolutionary. Lappé laid out the evidence that contradicted the expert wisdom on hunger and scarcity:

- There is 1½ times more than enough food to feed everyone on the Earth
- hunger is due to poverty, not scarcity
- and the way the developed world produces and consumes food is damaging the planet.

Lappé's book became a bestseller, though that didn't immediately change the way people went about addressing world hunger. So, Lappé and her colleague, Joseph Collins, wrote another book called *Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity* (1974) and founded The Institute of Food and Development Policy, popularly known as Food First. Then they published *World Hunger: Ten Myths*. Food First challenged the mainstream notions of scarcity, overpopulation, the Green Revolution, and free trade, among other "myths" commonly associated with hunger.

Hunger is not a myth, they argued, but how we have learned to understand and combat hunger is based on myths.

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Food First is a “peoples’ think tank” and
education-for-action center. Our work
highlights the root causes and solutions to
hunger and poverty, with a commitment to
fighting racism and establishing food as a
fundamental human right.

Food First has gone on to publish over 50 books and hundreds of reports, articles, and papers. We’ve also become a training ground for thought leaders that went on to found many other vital organizations like Pesticide Action Network, Neighbor to Neighbor, Global Exchange, Center for Living Democracy, Focus on the Global South, Korea Policy Institute, Land Research Action Network, Oakland Institute, and the Oakland Food Policy Council. All of these initiatives challenge the status quo and work for healthy, equitable food systems.

Astoundingly, what Frances Moore Lappé wrote back in 1971 is still true today: the world produces 1 ½ times more than enough food to feed everyone—enough to feed 10 billion people, the expected limit of global population growth in 2050. Further, the corporate food system contributes up to 1/3 of the world’s greenhouse gases, making industrial agriculture one of the main forces behind climate change.

To those just getting involved in the new “food movement,” it may seem that we are not making much progress on ending hunger or environmental destruction.

But let’s think again. The understanding that poverty—not scarcity—is at the root cause of hunger, has been accepted at the United Nations’ office on The Right to Food; the global movement for Food Sovereignty has hundreds of millions of supporters challenging the destructiveness and inequity of the dominant food system and calling for a more democratic and sustainable approach to food; hundreds upon hundreds of community organizations in the US food justice movement are demanding good, clean, fair food; and, they are growing it, taking back control over their community food security.

In reality, the paradigm about food, hunger, and the environment has shifted. It has changed from one of fear and scarcity to one of participation, fairness, and sustainability. People are not only thinking and talking in new ways about the issues—they are informed, active, and engaged as never before.

Food First has been a part of this growing movement from the very beginning. Our steadfast commitment to ending the injustices that cause hunger by changing the way people think has paid off. As a member-supported organization, we have been able to speak truth to power without worrying about financial or economic retaliation. This has kept us shoulder to shoulder with the farmers, activists, and community leaders on the front lines of systems change.

We’re still at it. Our latest two books *Fertile Ground: Scaling Agroecology from the Ground Up*, and *Land Justice: Re-imagining Land, Food and the Commons in the United States*, are powerful anthologies from the communities in the US and around the world that are transforming our food systems, and our societies.

Right-wing foundations in the United States lavish money on their think tanks in an effort to create an ideological consensus of corporate dominance, climate denial and the privatization of everything (progressive foundations tend to fund projects that clean up the right wing’s mess). It is heartening to know that Food First, “a people’s think tank” supported by the grassroots, has been able to change these narratives.

Together, we are fighting for sustainability, equity, and human decency.



We refuse to succumb to the cynicism of “the more things change, the more they remain the same.” In our 41 years of engagement with the politics of food, the more things try to remain the same—thanks to informed activism—the more they change.

Feeding the World Without Destroying It

By *Ahna Kruzic and Eric Holt-Giménez*

The seas are rising, droughts are spreading, and storms are becoming more violent. Many people in the world are already feeling the disastrous effects of climate change—especially farmers.

Farming is a special climate case because not only do crops suffer under erratically changing weather patterns, but agriculture—at least the high-input, fossil fuel and chemical-based agriculture that is being touted as the solution to world hunger—is one of the major sources of greenhouse gases (GHG) that drive global warming.

Can we feed the world without destroying it? The answer is a definite “yes!” Climate change impacts hunger, but this doesn’t mean hunger or global warming are inevitable. But we will have to change the way we grow and consume our food.

The good news is we already have the methods to both feed and cool the planet: agroecology. The problem is, the agrifoods industry—and our political leaders—want to keep business as usual.

That’s why we joined the US Food Sovereignty Alliance for the People’s Climate March in Washington, DC. We know that our food system depends on choices—choices that determine whether or not we reverse global warming and end hunger.

The global food system accounts for up to one-third of today’s global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. From synthetic fertilizer application to transport and storage, our industrial agriculture system is dependent on fossil fuels. Methane emissions di-

rectly from animals, synthetic inputs, and large-scale deforestation and land degradation have proven to be a disastrous environmental cocktail.

Livestock alone now produce more GHGs than all global transportation combined. Eighty percent of the livestock industry’s expansion comes from industrial-scale factory farms. This large-scale growth is driven by corporate consolidation around the world. Monsanto and Bayer are expecting a rubber stamp from the Trump administration for the biggest agribusiness merger in history that will give them a third of the global seed market and a quarter of the global pesticide market. ChemChina and Syngenta’s proposed merger follows, and Dow and Dupont are following suit.

But these agribusiness behemoths are not proposing solutions that address climate change. Instead, from seed to plate, the agriculture system is preparing for increasing intensification, consolidation, and technical upsizing – ultimately requiring increased dependence on fossil fuels and other carbon-intensive technologies.

And these developments hurt farmers, too. As farmers’ profit margins are eaten by the cost of corporate technological developments such as big data, nanotechnology and synthetic biology, farms need to get bigger and bigger just to survive. Ultimately, farmers are substituted by “more efficient” technologies that further tie us to a fossil fuel-based agricultural economy.

But it doesn’t have to be this way.

Agroecology offers us transformative solutions to hunger and climate change by combining traditional knowledge with today’s cutting-edge science for sustainable agriculture.

Agroecological practices not only increase food security via the production of food for local markets, they also preserve cultural heritage and community well-being by ensuring dignified livelihoods, helping to keep family farmers on the land. Further, agroecological practices increase resiliency to climate change by replenishing local resources such as soil fertility, water tables, species biodiversity, and carbon capture. Agroecology isn't just a technical practice, it's an agricultural science and a social movement to transform the food system.

Our food and agriculture system is a vessel of profound social and political power, and the implications of this are serious. That's why industrial agriculture giants such as Monsanto and Bayer are amping up their fight for control over our food. Whether it's direct manipulation and patenting of DNA or technology enabling digital tracking of cultivars by satellite, industry is reaching to maintain power over our food system, energy economy—and finally, the ways in which our social and political systems are organized.

But that's also why peasants, farmers, farmworkers, and consumers around the world are using agroecology as a strategy to rebuild local food security, biodiversity, community, and political power.



Cuba: Organic Revolution &
Evolution
November 10th-19th 2017
foodfirst.org/cuba

We can feed the world without destroying it; the question is, will we?

Food Sovereignty Tours Scholarship Recipients

By Marina Vergara

As we write this, Food First's next group of activists have embarked on a Food Sovereignty Tour to Cuba. With help from a generous donor, we offered scholarships to two delegates. Food First's Food Sovereignty Tour scholarships are essential to providing greater opportunity for all to participate in our tours, and would not be possible without Food First's supporters.

Both hailing from California, recipients Hevelynn Nealy and Lydia

Yamaguchi are activists and teachers in their respective communities.

Hevelynn works closely with after school programs coordinating enrichment opportunities for community youth. Her work focuses on the development of a community garden and holistic learning center. Lydia is a garden-based science and nutrition educator, where she teaches about where food comes from and how it grows. She helps students connect with food, living things, and their bodies.

The Food First delegation is honored to welcome Hevelynn and Lydia as we continue to learn about food sovereignty and how to foster its growth.

So many ways to support our impact in 2017 & beyond:

- Food First accepts tax-deductible contributions in cash, check, credit and debit cards, and stock. You can give in person, over the phone, through the mail, or online at www.foodfirst.org/support.
- Become a monthly sustainer so we can count on your support throughout the year!
- Name Food First in your will, IRA, or life insurance policy to leave a living legacy for future generations fighting for a fair food system.
- Donate real estate, set up a pooled income fund, or create a charitable remainder trust for your investments. Check with your tax and legal advisors to determine what is best for your situation.
- Help a young activist or farmer connect with the global food sovereignty movement by supporting the Food Sovereignty Tours Scholarship Fund: www.foodfirst.org/tours/scholarships/food-sovereignty-tours-scholarship-fund/
- Have other kinds of gifts you can share? Check out our opportunities to intern and volunteer with Food First.