



*Photo by Luke Jones (CC BY 2.0)*

## **Food First and Local Organization Team Up to Make Big Impact on Community Supported Agriculture**

Food First believes in the power of deeply informed activism and organizing, and that when people come together, we win. That's why Food First is honored to have collaborated with local Bay Area food justice organization, Phat Beets, to publish an article breaking down the contradictions and consequences of a new food start-up posing as community supported agriculture (CSA).

Funded by wealthy venture capitalists, Imperfect Produce markets itself as a CSA by delivering boxes of “ugly” produce from agribusiness that grocery chains will not sell. Branding itself as a solution to “food waste,” Imperfect Produce has exploded to 10 cities across the United States.

Phat Beets is an integral part of the East Bay Community. Not only providing healthy, local, and fresh produce to low-income residents of Oakland, they support youth of color to gain culinary skill sets and work with farmers of color for their CSA. However, since Imperfect Produce came on the scene, Phat Beets had lost a third of their business, forcing them to scale back many of their food justice initiatives. Their moral economy was being pushed out by another hungry startup.

Together, Phat Beets and Food First dug deeper into Imperfect's market-based solution and how it affects community organizations and small, local farmers and their CSAs. Our research and analysis show that their “solution” to food waste only serves to profit from

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INSTITUTE FOR FOOD AND  
DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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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.

the *effects* of a wasteful food system while ignoring its primary *cause*: overproduction. Commodifying ugly produce may be a clever business plan, but it does nothing to get to the root cause of food waste—capitalist overproduction.

Since the article, many concerned consumers have taken action. On Phat Beets’ website, many Imperfect Produce customers declared that they have since cancelled their subscriptions, frustrated that they weren’t buying from an actual community-supported agriculture operation nor were they actually solving food waste. Phat Beets has since seen a sharp rise in their subscriptions from people showing solidarity and support for alternative, community-based economies.

Amplifying the voices of frontline communities struggling for social change is crucial to building a just food system and society. Political education plays a pivotal role for our social movements and frontline communities struggling for an equitable food system, and Food First is honored to lend support whenever and wherever necessary.

Stay tuned as we continue to develop more publications around these issues. Please take a look at *The Ugly Truth of Ugly Produce* and *Food Waste: Valuing a New Commodity* on our website at [food-first.org/theuglytruth](http://food-first.org/theuglytruth) and [foodfirst.org/foodwaste](http://foodfirst.org/foodwaste). To learn more about Phat Beets, visit [www.phatbeetsproduce.org](http://www.phatbeetsproduce.org).

## Food Sovereignty Tours Transition

What does Food Sovereignty actually look like? In 2010, this question led us to launch a pathbreaking project in educational tourism to experience food sovereignty around the globe.

Food First’s Food Sovereignty Tours took farmers, students, educators, professionals, and activists to meet with and learn from the communities that are forging food sovereignty on the ground. For over 8 years, over 300 travellers joined us as we travelled to Cuba, Bolivia, Mexico, South Korea, Hawaii, Italy, and the Basque country. Many returned to work on food sovereignty in their own communities. Friendships, alliances, and projects emerged naturally from these people-to-people experiences.

We are inspired by the reach and depth of Food Sovereignty Tours, and for that, we have all of you to thank. We thank every participant who created a critical learning space and took home with them the lessons and experiences of those on the frontlines of change. We also thank the many who donated whatever they could to provide scholarships to youth, farmers, and people of color, creating diverse and inclusive spaces to dismantle age, race and class-based boundaries. Finally, we would like to honor the local movement organizers and farmers who worked with us to shape an experience that inspired action. We are forever indebted to you.

Food First, however, will be transitioning to re-focus our efforts into deepening our analysis and research to build the food sovereignty movement from the group up. We are devolving the tour operations to a close ally, [AltruVistas](http://AltruVistas) travel. We are excited to continue the work as a support organization to a socially and environmentally responsible solidarity tour operator and provide any research and analysis as necessary to aid in your learning and action.

Please visit our website at <https://food-first.org/transition/> to see the entire letter.



*Thies Gardens: Senegal*



**Coming Soon:  
Groundbreaking Film on  
Glyphosate to be Exclusively  
Sold by Food First!**

This past August, Dewayne Johnson, a former school groundskeeper, won a landmark lawsuit for \$289 million against the chemical agribusiness giant Monsanto (now Bayer). Johnson argued in his lawsuit that his use of glyphosate, the main ingredient found in the weed killer Roundup Ready, caused his fatal cancer. The lawsuit also claimed that Monsanto had knowingly failed to warn consumers of its product's risks. A San Francisco jury agreed, ushering in a potential watershed moment for many similar lawsuits to follow.

*Roundup Facing its Judges*, a new documentary directed by French journalist Marie-Monique Robin, reveals that this lawsuit is just the tip of the iceberg. *Roundup Facing its Judges* exposes the devastating impact of glyphosate around the world. Robin's documentary brings the voices of the workers, farmers, and communities at the forefront of glyphosate exposure in order to demonstrate the scale of one of the greatest environmental and health scandals in modern history. By also bringing us the testimonies from the Monsanto Tribunal at the Hague, which included scientists, lawyers, doctors and more, Robin sheds light on the consequences of agribusiness' power over our global food system.

Food First will be offering this critical documentary (unavailable elsewhere in the US) to our members. As this film illustrates, Monsanto's ecocide is glob-

al. The company's relentless pursuit for profits has irrevocably harmed the workers, farmers, and communities living and working in the fields, forests, rural landscapes and more. While Monsanto (now Bayer) will do everything in its power to silence these lawsuits and discredit documentaries such as this, perhaps the corporation's reckoning is finally approaching. You won't want to miss out on this critical film.

Look forward to hearing more details about this offer very soon!

**Spreading Agroecology and  
Closing the Gender Gap in  
Eastern and Southern African  
Food Systems**

Food First Fellow, Haroon Akram-Lodhi is continuing his research on the role of patriarchy and the gender gap in Eastern and Southern African food systems. Haroon is examining how the gender gap between men and women in agriculture is a consequence of men deploying patriarchal power in the context of the food system to maintain their own privileged position, ultimately sustaining an inequitable food system. Haroon said "this is central to Food First's narrative of ways in which we need to understand the dynamics of food systems. This type of work has been very strongly informed by Food First's perspective."

Haroon stated that the next step going forward is working with the United Nations to find ways to close the gender gap. While the UN wants to take on the issue through a "climate-smart" approach, Haroon has discussed with UN officials that there is an enormous contradiction with what is considered "climate-smart." Similar to the argument in our January 2018 Policy Brief, *What's Smart About Climate-smart Agriculture?*, Haroon has argued that "climate-smart" initiatives run into trouble since they support industrial agricultural practices preferred by agribusiness, while also stating support for agroecological practices. Haroon maintains that only agroecological practices are truly "climate-smart" and should also serve as the foundation for projects curbing the gender gap in agriculture. Haroon stated that "it is not just advocacy work, but policy work that I find use for Food First's insights."

**Connecting Our Movements:  
Food First Travels to Australia**

For the first time, Food First will be traveling to Australia as part of a 10-day, multi-city speaking tour! Food First's Eric Holt-Giménez will be giving talks at universities, joining panel discussions with food system activists, and taking part in conferences during this exciting tour. The series will focus on the opportunities and challenges in bringing together farmers, farm workers, food workers, activists, and grassroots organizations to build a united movement for systemic change. The series will converge on the idea that by understanding how and why our food system operates and exists as it is, we can ultimately use this moment of global and national crisis to build a powerful movement for transformation capable of mobilizing resistance and inspiring change.

We are thrilled and grateful that Eva Perroni, a former Food First intern, and Future Feeders, have organized and coordinated this series.

Visit our website at [foodfirst.org/events/australiatour](http://foodfirst.org/events/australiatour) to view the full list of cities and events that we will be attending.

**National Assembly to Build  
US Food Sovereignty**

On October 12-15, grassroots organizations, farmers, workers, activists, scholars, and more will come together in Bellingham, WA for the IV National Assembly of the US Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA). The Assembly will provide a space to learn about food sovereignty, share struggles and collective wins, discuss strategy, and mutually exchange knowledge. The aim of the



Assembly is to strengthen relationships across sectors and geographies while charting a path forward towards transforming the food system.

Food First is excited to attend and take part in this important gathering.

To learn more about the USFSA or to register for the assembly if you are a member of USFSA, please visit <http://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/>.

## International Campaign to End Corporate Capture of Land in Brazil

Food First fellow, Maria Luisa Mendonça and her organization, Rede Social de Justiça e Direitos Humanos (Network for Social Justice and Human Rights – [www.social.org.br](http://www.social.org.br)), along with others, are conducting an international campaign to denounce and put a stop to financial institutions from using financial assets to promote land grabbing in Brazil.

Following the global financial collapse that began in 2007, financial companies began investing in farmland around the globe. Maria has been researching the role that international finance plays in the land grabs occurring in

the Cerrado region of Brazil. Maria is examining how financial institutions are using pensions, endowments, and investment funds from the US and Europe to speculate on land in Brazil. Financial institutions with ties to Brazilian agribusiness are purchasing public, common-use land that is mainly used by small farmers who do not own land. This land is purchased at very low prices, often illegally, then converted to mono-cropping for agribusiness, which tends to raise the land's value, leading to increased speculation by investors looking to make quick profits.

The local landowning oligarchy is helping facilitate the entry of foreign investors into the local land markets on the frontiers of agricultural expansion in Brazil. Spurred on by global finance, violence is often used to dispossess small and indigenous farmers of their land, while surrounding forests are destroyed and the land is converted to mono-cropping. Maria's research shows that even as commodities have lost their value, the land prices have remained high due to increased speculation, making it an incredibly valuable asset. Control over land for its commercial value is the central driver for the land grabs occurring there.



Photo by Cristiano Navarro – An indigenous family displaced by agribusiness in Brazil

Another part of the campaign thus seeks to block land grabbing at the regional and local level in Brazil as well. The campaign has shown that many of the land purchases have been done through an illegal process known as “grilagem,” which encloses public land and legalizes ownership through fake land titles. Mendonça's organization has been working with local communities to claim back the right to the land that has gone through the illegal process. Recently, a judge cancelled several of these illegal transactions thanks, in part, to both research and grassroots efforts.

To learn more about this issue and more, visit [www.social.org.br](http://www.social.org.br).

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## Food First Members Give Back

For 35 years, Valerie Anderson taught Human Ecology at Sacramento State University. She worked endlessly to foster people who would not only fight for our earth, but for each other.

“I used Frances Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins' book *Diet for a Small Planet* as my classroom textbook, and have supported everything Food First stands for since. Not only did we examine the root causes of injustice, but that the meaning of life is the relationships we create—no matter how brief, long, intense, light or superficial as it may seem, it's all important.”

Valerie is not only a committed educator, but has been a Food First donor for over 20 years. Please consider standing with Valerie and educators, farmers, and activists like her to end the root causes of injustice in our food system and beyond.

The end of the year is one of the most important times to give, so please consider giving to Food First to support grassroots research and action. We don't take a penny from corporations or governments, making us truly powered by the people!



## Ways to Give to Ensure Food First's Success:

- Become a Monthly Sustainer – your gift ensures our longtime stability!
- Enclose your donation in our reply envelope or donate at [www.foodfirst.org/support](http://www.foodfirst.org/support)
- Name Food First in your will
- Give appreciated stocks and bonds
- Donate to our Pooled Income Fund
- Create a Charitable Remainder Trust
- Donate part of your IRA or qualified retirement plan