



Factsheet: Threats to Local Control of the Food System

Sovereignty is a shared value across the globe and is defined as “governance free from external sources of control.”ⁱ Yet the right of nations and communities to determine how their food is produced and distributed is being eroded on a number of fronts. How and why?

Concentration of Agribusiness

In their efforts to gain a bigger share of the market and maximize profits, large agribusinesses frequently merge with, or buy up, smaller companies. Much of the world’s food system is under the control of a handful of a few transnational corporations.

- 10 companies control half of the world’s commercial seed sales.ⁱⁱ
- In the United States, the five largest supermarket chains are responsible for almost half of all retail food sales.ⁱⁱⁱ

Corporations Influence Food Policy

Transnational corporations wield tremendous power over food and agriculture policy both in the United States and internationally. Lobbyists for the agribusiness industry pressure elected representatives for subsidies and trade and environmental policies in their favor. The result is that food and agriculture policy are shaped to benefit large corporations and not small-scale farmers, consumers or the environment.

- During the 2004 election cycle, the agribusiness industry contributed \$53 million to political campaigns.^{iv}

Free Trade Agreements Trump National Policies

International free trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), can block a country’s ability to set its own laws regarding food and agriculture.

- To comply with NAFTA, the Mexican government removed an article from the country’s constitution that protected collective indigenous and peasant land holdings.^v
- In 2006, the WTO forced six European countries to lift their bans on the import of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) despite widespread support of the bans by farmer and consumer organizations.

Communities Can’t Pass Their Own Legislation

“Preemption” bills prevent local governments from passing policies, ordinances or initiatives such as environmental laws that would exclude certain seeds, plants and size of livestock operations. By 2007, 16 U.S. states had adopted statewide preemption bills.^{vi}

Consumers Don’t Know What’s in Their Food

Despite numerous polls demonstrating that the majority of consumers in the United States believe that foods with genetically engineered ingredients should be labeled, and requests from eight state attorneys general that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) require mandatory labeling of all genetically engineered foods, the FDA has so far refused to do so.^{vii}





Factsheet: Food Sovereignty & Local Control

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets; and to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority in managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources. Food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather, it promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production.

"Statement on Peoples' Food Sovereignty" by the Via Campesina, et al., 1996

What are specific food sovereignty policies for our communities?

Fair prices to farmers ensured through:

- Price floors for commodities that cover the cost of production and pay farmers a decent price for their goods.
- Reserves of storable commodities to ensure food security in times of scarcity and price stability in times of plenty.
- Conservation set-asides that take land out of production when there would be an over abundance of production (such over-production leads to low prices and unnecessary strain on the environment).

Anti-trust laws enforced. Pass a competition title in the Farm Bill that limits, for example, meat packers' ability to own livestock and makes our anti-trust laws apply to the food industry, from seed companies to supermarkets

Environmental programs tied to levels of production that reward sustainable farming methods. The current Conservation Security Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program forces taxpayers to subsidize some of the largest water, food, soil and air polluters.

Strong community food programs. Increase funding for local procurement of food and for community gardens and farm-to-cafeteria programs, especially in poor communities.

Increased public funding for sustainable and organic agriculture research, technical assistance and credit to support farmers transitioning from conventional to organic farming.

Mandatory "Country of Origin Labeling" (C.O.O.L.) for our produce, fish and meat, telling consumers where their food was grown, harvested and raised.

References

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- v. *Anatomy of a Zapatista Rebellion* by Milt Shapiro, Committee for Indigenous Solidarity and Project South Member www.projectsouth.org/resources/zap2.html
- vi. "Background: Industry Aims to Strip Local Control of Food Supply," www.environmentalcommons.org
- vii. "Organic, not Genetically Engineered: Summary of Public Opinion Surveys Related to Labeling of Genetically Engineered Foods," by Consumers Policy Institute/Consumers Union, available at Friends of the Earth; <http://www.consumersunion.org/food/summpollny699.htm>

