

Food First NEWS & VIEWS

INSTITUTE FOR FOOD AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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Highlights of Food First's Impact in 2008

Food First's web site postings for 2008 reflect a very busy year indeed. Check it out and while you are there, sign up for "People Putting Food First." www.foodfirst.org

LOCAL—With the hiring of coordinator, Alethea Harper, Food First now provides an "incubation" home for the long-anticipated Oakland Food Policy Council. The plan is that this new organization can be independently serving the residents of Oakland within three years. Read more about Alethea and the Food Policy Council at www.oaklandfood.org. Initial funders include Friedman Family Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, City of Oakland, the Alameda County Public Health Department, Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation, and the HOPE Collaborative.



Oaxacan farm women resting after demonstrating their sustainable agriculture practices to a Food First tour group

NATIONAL—Food First interns interviewing food banks across the country in the summer of 2008, found that demand for donated food was outstripping supply, with some food banks forced to ration and cut hours of operation while frantically searching for new sources of food. These interviews formed the basis for Food First's Fall 2008 Backgrounder *The Food Crisis Comes Home: Empty food banks, rising costs—symptoms of a hungrier nation*. Food First participates in a new coalition, The U.S. Working Group on the Food Crisis. In response to deepening financial stress, this coalition held an October 16 New York City event to kick off a campaign to put the food crisis squarely on the presidential agenda. With the election of Barack Obama, activists nationwide plunged into organizing aimed at bringing about long-anticipated changes to our health, social services, food and farming systems.

In May Food First was invited to present recommendations to the Congressional House Committee on Financial Services (<http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/2122>). Farmworker labor and living conditions are the unseen side of relatively cheap food here in the U.S.. The October 2008 release of our documentary, *Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail* with its companion study guide, will be followed by the publication of a new book, *Beyond the Fence: A journey to the roots of the migration crisis*. These solid educational materials for classroom and community discussion kick off Food First's 2009 educational campaign aimed at allowing more Americans to deepen their understanding of Mexican migration and consider possible political solutions. This national work is entirely funded by the generous donations of our 6,000 individual donors.

INTERNATIONAL—Food First staff and interns spent much of 2008 documenting the root causes of the food crisis for a book slated for June 2009 publication, *Food Rebellions: Crisis and the Hunger for Justice*. Co-published with Fahamu and Grassroots International, this book will be released simultaneously in the U.S., Europe and Africa. Our work with African farm, civic, and women's groups continued in 2008. AAAGRr! e-mail reports keep people informed of the latest developments of the Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa (AGRA), and of the existing agroecological alternatives being advanced by African farmers and social movements. As part of our project to amplify farmers' voices for African Agroecological Alternatives to the Green Revolution, we also gave a presentation on "Climate Change, Adaptation, and the Challenge of Agroecological Alternatives" at an international multi-stakeholder dialogue on the Green Revolution called by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food held in Luxembourg. This work is funded by the New Field Foundation and the Christensen Fund. Agroecological training, sustainable marketing and pollinator work with indigenous and small farmer organizations of the Campesino-a-Campesino Movement in Mexico also continued in 2008, funded by the C.S. Fund and Montana Vistas.

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SISTER INSTITUTE

Focus on the Global South,
Bangkok, Thailand
www.focusweb.org

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 establishing food as a fundamental human right.

Dear Food First members and supporters,

What a difficult, challenging, yet hopeful year it's been! Widespread food price riots and the global financial meltdown formed a tumultuous backdrop for the unprecedented election of Barack Obama, the U.S.'s first African American president. The publication of the ground-breaking IAASTD report, the UNDP's report on Sustainable Agriculture in Africa, and Ecuador's new Food Sovereignty law all advanced people-centered, agroecological alternatives to the failed policies recycled at the disappointing 2008 Rome and 2009 Madrid food summits. On the ground—in the face economic adversity, the re-appearance of conditions of modern-day slavery in the industrial food system, the steady march of agrofuels, land grabs, and “new” corporate-driven Green Revolutions—people, communities and social movements are putting food first, steadily bringing about the “changes we can believe in” in our food systems.

At Food First, 2008 pushed us to double our efforts to expose the root causes of the “four-fold crisis” of food, fuel, finance and climate. Our conclusion? To solve the food crisis we need to transform the food system.

Sound ambitious? Yes, but there has never been a better time to end hunger. In spite of decades of globalization, people around the planet continue to save local seeds, hold on to family farms, build local economies, establish fair and local markets, and stubbornly keep their civic organizations alive. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of activists worldwide are working tirelessly to ensure the transparency and accountability of our public and international institutions, struggling to roll back the monopoly power of the agrifoods corporations, and fighting for the “triple bottom line” of social, economic and environmental sustainability. These efforts have not only put constant pressure on governments, international finance institutions and multinational corporations, they have also created important social and political infrastructure for the growing practice of food sovereignty—the democratic control over our food systems.

Taken together, organizations that number in the tens of thousands have, over the years, developed a wealth of political, technical and entrepreneurial skills that put food first—before monopoly mega-profits. Organizations are steadily building bridges that link sustainable production practices, equitable trade relationships and new, locally-centered businesses around the globe. But despite their steady growth, sustainable agriculture and community-based food systems find it hard to “scale up” to become the rule rather than the exception.

As long as we buy into the lie that only big business can stave off starvation due to their efficiencies of scale, Cargill, ADM, Monsanto, Tyson, Tesco, and Wal-Mart will dominate our food systems. The truth is that agri-food industry's dominance comes, not from efficiency, but from their control of vast expanses of land, immense marketing power, cheap oil, taxpayer subsidies, protective tariffs, tax breaks, and the exploitation of underpaid labor. Furthermore, industrial agri-foods corporations almost never pay the total costs of the extensive social and environmental damage resulting from overuse of chemicals, labor abuses, and unhealthy food products. Given this skewed playing field, it's a wonder that sustainable local producers and marketers even exist. But they are growing and we need to help them make the systemic leap from being hopeful “alternatives” to become the mainstream norm. The task is not about making small projects bigger or simply creating more and more small projects—though both of these things will happen. The larger challenge is to remove structural barriers that are holding back all these promising initiatives. The technology, business organizational models, and experience already exist. Now we need to change the outdated rules of our food system so that rather than favoring monopoly control over our food, they ensure

Do you find yourself asking what more you might do to promote greater access to healthy food for all people? Consider ways that you can strengthen the advocacy role of Food First/The Institute for Food and Development Policy. Your financial support will help us mount a public information campaign and get discussions going about moving food out of global trade so that every nation can become food self-sufficient.

Food sovereignty is possible in every country worldwide, given the desire, education, access to resources, and sufficient human labor. Climate change dictates that the days of global, industrial food trade are numbered. Join with others to support gardeners and farmers who are feeding themselves, their families, friends and neighbors alike.

BECOME A LOCAVOR—Eat as much food grown within 100 miles of your home as possible. Join a CSA subscription

farm and get a box of produce weekly, join a co-op grocery, or shop at your farmers' market.

GARDEN—If you don't have the space, call city hall and find out where the community gardens are. If there are none, ask the owner of a vacant plot if you can start one. Then invite your friends to pitch in. Pick the fruit from the trees of elderly residents and distribute a portion to those in need in

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Letter from Eric...

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diversity, resilience, sustainability and *democratic* control of our food systems.

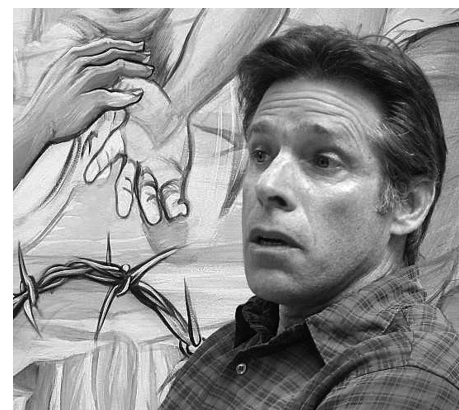
If there is a silver lining to the food and financial crisis, it is that it might be leveraged to change how we produce and consume our food. The institutional pillars of our global food systems are beginning to buckle under the weight of decades of unsustainable production and consumption.

Though the industrial agri-foods complex continue to expand its monopolies, the public institutions that do their bidding are fracturing. And the food and financial crises have shaken public faith in the international institutions that govern our global food and financial systems. Not only were the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and northern governments unable to prevent the food and financial meltdowns, they were caught completely off guard. After years of vigorously promoting trade liberalization, the WTO is still unable to muster enthusiasm or agreement on the Doha trade round.

The World Bank and the IMF—widely detested even before the crises—are struggling to re-invent themselves in spite of their failed policies in the developing world. Internationally weakened and internally fractured, the solutions they advance to solve the food and financial crises are compromised by political maneuvering to ensure each institution's very survival.

Encouragingly, the broad-based movements for food sovereignty—literally, people's self-government of the food system—are widespread and growing rapidly. First defined by the international peasant federation Via Campesina as "people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems," food sovereignty is a much deeper concept than food security—the term usually employed by governments, the FAO and the World Food Program—because food sovereignty proposes democratic control over food; from production and processing, to distribution, marketing and consumption.

The wrenching changes of 2008 point to three lessons. First the knowledge, technologies, alternative business models and social initiatives necessary to confront the crises in our food systems already exist. We do not need new "magic bullets" or "old wine in new bottles" to end hunger, poverty or environmental destruction. The second is that people in thousands of communities around the world now know that their very survival depends upon equitable, sustainable and democratic management of their food systems. Finally, rural communities and urban neighborhoods are organizing into many and diverse local, regional and global movements to forge the political will needed to build truly sustainable ways



Eric Holt-Giménez speaking at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

of living. These movements are bringing together advocates and practitioners into a powerful force to confront this four-fold crises of food, finance, fuel and climate. As they move steadily closer to one another, this powerful trend of convergence in diversity is gaining momentum.

Here at Food First we have our work cut out for the coming year. But for the first time in a long time, we see a rising tide of hope, community spirit, and genuine enthusiasm for transformative, structural change. Hope and enthusiasm are literally priceless—we can't buy them and we can't end hunger or poverty without them. Thankfully, our supply of both is growing! And you can take credit for helping to move us toward the day when we all will have access to sufficient, healthy food.

ERIC HOLT-GIMÉNEZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

your community. Check if your food bank or food pantry has a garden where you might help out.

SUBSCRIBE to Food First's twice-monthly *People Putting Food First* e-newsletter for more ideas about keeping it local from communities around the world. www.foodfirst/en/newsletter. Forward issues to friends and build your own local eating network.

IF YOU HAVEN'T DONATED YET to Food First, we invite you to join now. Individuals like you provided 90% of our financial support in 2008. Any amount that you can spare will be most appreciated and carefully spent. If you now donate once or twice a year, please consider becoming a monthly sustainer. You can make a one-time donation on-line at <https://www.foodfirst.org/en/support/donate> or monthly at <https://www.foodfirst.org/en/support/monthly> Or you can call us and make a donation by phone at 510-654-4400 ext 234 or drop the enclosed envelope in the mail along with your check.

DO YOUR PART TO EDUCATE your friends and neighbors about immigration issues. Host a *Caminos: The Immigrant's Trail* documentary house party or public event. To get a copy of this 20-minute DVD and companion study guide, call 510-654-4400 ex 232.

SHARE Food First News and Views and Backgrounders with friends. Call us and we will send copies to you or your friends. Or print what you want from our web site to share with others.

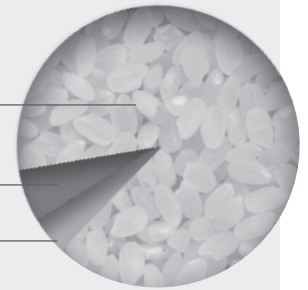
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GIVE A GIFT membership, T-shirt or book. Gift memberships are perfect for wedding, anniversary, and birthday gifts. We will send a note to those you designate.

Fiscal Year 2008

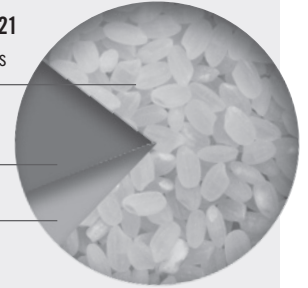
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Your annual donations allow Food First to dig behind the often confusing headlines and publicize exciting innovations in growing and delivering food in communities worldwide. Your legacy gift will allow Food First to continue to promote the message that food is the most basic of human rights.

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