

NEWS & VIEWS



Photo by Anuradha Mittal

Activists from around the world challenging international financial institutions.

A-16 Mobilization for Global Justice

A “run on the bank” has just begun. Along with 25,000 other protesters, Food First marched for Global Justice in Washington, DC on April 16 (popularly known as the A-16 mobilization), which finally brought the impenetrable International Monetary Fund and World Bank into the arena of public debate.

The A-16 mobilization was built on the international platform and slogan of “Break the Bank, Defund the Fund, Dump the Debt!” and endorsed by a strong and diverse coalition. Results included abundant civil disobedience and over 1,300 arrests, with police shutting down the Convergence Center on absurd fire code charges. Food First staff worked with Direct Action Network activists to negotiate the release of puppets and food supplies from the Convergence space.

What happened in DC did not happen overnight. Our work at Food First over the last twenty-five years has helped literally turn the ‘development debate’ on its head through our critique of the top-down model and the ecological devastation it generates. Though we failed to obstruct the Fund/Bank meetings, the combination of thorough preparation and the large turn-out helped raise public consciousness about the Fund and Bank to unprecedented levels and brought different activists into a successful coalition.

We at Food First pledge to continue this struggle for global justice and are now working with others to show peoples’ power at the upcoming Philadelphia and Los Angeles political party convention demonstrations.

INSTITUTE FOR FOOD AND
DEVELOPMENT POLICY

FOOD FIRST

398 60th Street, Oakland, CA 94618
Phone: (510) 654-4400
Fax: (510) 654-4551
E-Mail: foodfirst@foodfirst.org
Web Site: www.foodfirst.org

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Joseph Collins

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FOOD FIRST empowers citizens to address the root cause of hunger, poverty, and environmental decline. Our research and educational materials reveal how anti-democratic institutions and belief systems promote hunger and environmental destruction.

Food First's Fifth Annual Sustainable Agriculture Delegation to Cuba

A small twelve-year-old boy stood shyly on the rocky path, surrounded by fragrant herbs and flowers. Proudly, he held up a bunch of succulent purple-veined basil.

"I grew it myself," he said with a smile.

His name is Luis Miguel. He volunteers after school at the Community Food Processing and Preservation Center in Marianao, Havana. He is just one of the many gardeners and farmers who met with Food First's fifth Sustainable Agriculture Delegation to Cuba.

The twenty-five delegates were professors, gardeners, farmers, researchers, and activists, who traveled to Cuba to learn how this tiny country has managed to pull itself out of a severe food crisis using primarily organic techniques. Some, like two delegates from Indonesia, were interested in the applications of Cuban technology. Others were laying groundwork for US-Cuban partnerships and joint research projects.

Seven of the nine days were spent in Havana and its immediate environs, visiting research centers and experimental plots, and meeting with scientists and policy-makers. All of the projects contained an element of cooperation between community and government that has enabled the massive growth in gardens and sustainable agriculture production across the country. At a meeting with Food First's Cuban affiliate, the Cuban Association of Agriculture and Forestry Technicians, they reiterated their commitment to encouraging cooperatives and small-scale farming for local production.

The delegation was a moving experience for many who have worked promoting this type of food system in other parts of the world.

For more information about Food First's Cuban Organic Agriculture Exchange Program go to www.foodfirst.org/cuba or subscribe to our listserve at cuba-ag-subscribe@topica.com



Julio Antonio Ortega Gonzalez, manager at the Oganoponico Rotunda de Cojimar, stands in front of the on-site vegetable stand. The sign reads "You Decide—Organic, Tasty and Healthy from the Field to your Table—The best in Vegetables."

Food First on the Web

Food First is committed to utilizing the Internet to make our resources available to students, teachers, journalists, policy-makers, and the general public. We offer analyses of the root causes of world hunger and poverty, information about the struggle to reform the global food system, and ways to get involved in the movement to establish food as a human right.

Over the past six months, we have made significant changes to our website. Action alerts, upcoming events, articles and reports by Food First staff and board members, and media coverage of our work are now available. Updates to the website occur more frequently than ever before. The latest news about Food First may be found on our homepage.

More is on the way. By summer's end we'll have an improved on-line bookstore for Food First publications, a new site search engine, and an updated look to celebrate our 25th Anniversary. If you haven't already, visit our website at www.foodfirst.org

Food First Debates Biotech Industry Supporters

Food First Executive Director Peter Rosset has been debating prominent supporters of genetically altered food. First he and Board member Miguel Altieri engaged Martina McGloughlin, director of the Center for Biotechnology at the University of California at Davis, on the Internet. Altieri and Rosset were invited to present their viewpoint—that biotechnology will not end hunger—in the pro-industry web-based journal AgBioForum. They argued that hunger is due to problems of inequality, and that altered crops present unknown and very worrisome risks. McGloughlin promised that ‘miracle’ technologies would create healthier foods, to which Altieri and Rosset responded with further discussion of risks and the proven potential of agroecological alternatives.

This was followed by an in-person debate on April 11 between Rosset and McGloughlin, hosted by the Commonwealth Club. Most observers agreed that Food First’s arguments carried the day. After the debate ended, McGloughlin, a leading advocate of

altered foods, was pried by the Biotic Baking Brigade, to the surprise of all.

Also on April 11, NPR’s Talk of the Nation “Science Friday” program sponsored a debate between the country’s two leading food policy think tanks. Dr. Per Pinstrup-Andersen, director general of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington, stated that anti-biotech activists will end up hurting the poor and hungry in the Third World. Speaking for the Institute for Food and Development Policy (IFDP/Food First), Peter Rosset argued that altered crops like “Vitamin A rice” completely miss targeting the real causes of hunger and malnutrition, and may actually make conditions worse.

Rosset also traveled on a speaking tour in Spain and the Basque country, on the invitation of the European Peasant Federation (CPE), the Basque Farmers Union (EHNE), and the University of Córdoba. He spoke on the perils of biotechnology and the World Trade Organization versus the real promise of local economic development based on small family farms. On



Photo by Marilyn Borchardt

Executive Director Peter Rosset speaking at the Commonwealth Club, April 11, 2000.

his return to the US, he presented a similar vision to the United Methodist Church Global Ministries at a Food Security Consultation held in St. Louis.

Resources on the Web

Read the full Altieri and Rosset versus McGloughlin debate at <http://www.foodfirst.org/action/2000/4-56-00.html>

Order a tape of the Rosset versus McGloughlin debate from the Commonwealth Club at <http://www.commonwealthclub.org>

Read the transcript or listen to audio of the NPR Food First versus IFPRI debate at <http://www.foodfirst.org/media/interviews/2000/scifri4-00.html>

Rally for Black Farmers and Small Family Farmers

Members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Black Congressional Caucus, including Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA), joined Black farmers and small family farmers from across the country in front of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on May 8, to protest decades of discrimination by the agency and demand support for America’s small family farmers.

The Rally for Black Family Farmers and the Family Farm Movement was organized by Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy and the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association (BFAA).

In January 1999, lawyers representing Black farmers in a class action suit against the USDA signed a consent agreement compensating each farmer with \$50,000 for discrimination suffered in the distribution of loans and disaster relief by the USDA between the years 1981 and 1996. Now the USDA is stalling in paying the compensation, with an over 40 percent rejection rate.

The situation of Black farmers in the US is very serious. In 1920, 925,000 US farmers were African Americans. In 1999, less than 18,000 African American farmers remained. Black-owned farms represent less than one

percent of US farmers, and are on the verge of extinction. Black farmers point to USDA discrimination as a major contributing factor in their declining numbers.

A background report on the situation of Black farmers in the US, can be found at: <http://www.foodfirst.org/pubs/backgrdrs/2000/w00v6n1.html>. We at Food First pledge to continue the struggle for justice for the black farmer and are working with others to show peoples’ power at the upcoming Philadelphia and Los Angeles political party convention demonstrations.

Food First—The 1990s

The 1990s brought the free market ideology of liberalization, privatization, and deregulation imposed by international financial institutions led by the World Bank, the IMF, and GATT (superseded by the WTO). Structural adjustment eliminated much of the social safety net in the US and countries around the world as the rich got richer and increasing numbers of the middle class dropped into poverty.

Food First's educational role has been to empower thousands of students, educators, and concerned citizens worldwide, contributing to a greater understanding of the impact of economic globalization. Our educational campaigns have included extensive international and national public speaking and publications. Since 1994, Food First has stepped up its campaign for the economic human right of all of the world's people to have the resources to feed themselves. This program included organizing two congressional hearings and a bus tour with the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Institute for Policy Studies.

1990

Dragons in Distress: Asia's Miracle Economies in Crisis
Walden Bello and
Stephanie Rosenfeld

Alternatives to the Peace Corps: A Directory of Third World and US Volunteer Opportunities, fourth edition
Katherine Castro

1992

Trading Freedom: How Free Trade Affects Our Lives, Work, and Environment
John Cavanagh, Karen Baker, and Gretchen Helmke

Alternatives to the Peace Corps: A Directory of Third World and US Volunteer Opportunities, fifth edition
Becky Buell, Victoria Clarke, and Susan Leone

People and Power in the Pacific: The Struggle for the Post-Cold War Order
Walden Bello

1994

Dark Victory: The United States and Global Poverty
Walden Bello with Shea Cunningham and Bill Rau

Alternatives to the Peace Corps: A Directory of Third World and US Volunteer Opportunities, sixth edition
Annette Olson

Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas
George Collier with Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello

Education for Action: Undergraduate and Graduate Programs that Focus on Social Change, second edition
Sean Brooks and
Alison Knowles

1995

Chile's Free-Market Miracle: A Second Look
Joseph Collins and
John Lear

Breakfast of Biodiversity: The Truth About Rain Forest Destruction
John Vandermeer and
Ivette Perfecto

1996

Alternatives to the Peace Corps: A Directory of Third World and US Volunteer Opportunities, sixth edition
Phil Lowenthal, Stephanie Tarnoff, and Lisa David

A Cautionary Tale: Failed US Development Policy in Central America
Michael E. Conroy,
Douglas L. Murray,
and Peter M. Rosset

The Greening of Cuba
documentary
Directed by Jaime Kibben

1997

Benedita da Silva: An Afro-Brazilian Woman's Story of Politics and Love
As told to Medea Benjamin
and Maisa Mendonça

1998

World Hunger: Twelve Myths, second edition
Frances Moore Lappé,
Joseph Collins, and Peter Rosset with Luis Esparza

A Siamese Tragedy: Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand
Walden Bello, Shea Cunningham, and
Li Kheng Poh

America Needs Human Rights documentary

Executive Producers
Anuradha Mittal and Peter Rosset. Produced and edited by Megan Sheer

1999

Alternatives to the Peace Corps: A Directory of Third World and U.S. Volunteer Opportunities, eighth edition
Filomena Giese with
Marilyn Borchardt and
Martha Fernandez

The Paradox of Plenty: Hunger in a Bountiful World
Douglas H. Boucher

America Needs Human Rights
Anuradha Mittal
and Peter Rosset

Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, revised edition
George Collier with Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello

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Food First/Institute for Food and Development
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