

Global Crises & Global Movements

The global food crisis—in which record numbers of people are going hungry during periods of record food production and record corporate profits—is actually a combination of multiple food, health, fuel, environmental and economic crises. These crises impact not only the land, air and water resources needed to grow food, but the lives and communities of those who grow, harvest, process, serve and—ultimately—everyone who eats food. The food crisis affects us all.



The global food crisis is more than the tragic increase in the number of hungry people and the pandemic of diet-related diseases. It is more than global climate change and the “dead zones” in our oceans. It is more than the violence of land and resource grabs, the loss of rural livelihoods, and the abuse of food and farmworkers...The food crisis is a political crisis in which the wrong decisions are being made regarding our local and global food systems. Ending the crisis requires more than simply producing more food or making healthier choices. It is a political project requiring social, economic, and political organization for transformative social change. Historically, social transformation comes about through a combination of crises and the growing power of social movements.



Successful social movements are formed by integrating activism with livelihoods. These integrated movements create the deep, sustained social pressure that produces political will—the key to transforming institutions, rules, attitudes and practices. As Samir Amin points out in *Food Movements Unite!*, over the last century, social movements fought back against the colonization and exploitation that accompanied the rise of global industrialism, “People invented efficient ways of organizing and of acting that worked well at the time:

for example, trade unions, political parties and wars of national liberation all produced gigantic progressive change in the history of humankind.” However, these historical movements have “run out of steam because the system has itself changed and moved into a new phase.”

Over the last few decades, new social movements have arisen, driven by justice issues of identity (such as gender, ethnicity or place) and by environmental and health concerns. While they have succeeded in connecting individuals to global issues like food justice and food sovereignty, these new social movements are still largely defensive—working to stop corporate monopolies from devouring the world’s resources and struggling to keep neoliberal policies from rolling back the hard-fought social gains of the 20th century. The new social movements are highly diverse and are forming new ways of building social power, of carrying out action and of doing politics.

La Vía Campesina—an international movement of 2.5 million farming, fishing and herding families around the world—has united rural (and increasingly urban) people like never before around a vision of “food sovereignty,” the right of all peoples to define their own food and agriculture systems. In the United States, the US Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA)—a coalition of over 30 farmer, food worker, farmworker and community organizations—works to promote food sovereignty through education and campaigns. Every year, the USFSA awards the Food Sovereignty Prize to organizations that are helping to democratize the food system in favor of the poor. Across the US and Canada, local citizens have formed food policy councils to “connect the dots” between the growing number of neighborhood food initiatives and communities forging policies for just, healthy food systems.

However, as a political force, our food movements are still very fragmented. This is why we must move beyond fragmentation and defensive positions to build broad-based alternatives through “convergence in diversity”—by building strategic progressive-radical alliances within the food justice and food sovereignty movements.

Dig Deeper:

Holt-Giménez, Eric, Raj Patel and Annie Shattuck. 2009. *Food Rebellions: Crisis and the Hunger for Justice*. Oakland: Food First Books.

Holt-Giménez, Eric, Ed. 2011. *Food Movements Unite! Strategies to Transform Our Food Systems*. Oakland: Food First Books.

Holt-Giménez, Eric. 2010. *Food Security, Food Justice, or Food Sovereignty?* Food First Backgrounder Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter).

La Vía Campesina:
www.viacampesina.org

US Food Sovereignty Alliance:
www.usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org

