

## **Food Sovereignty: A Just and Sustainable System:**

(Excerpted from Food Sovereignty NOW! *Via Campesina*, 2018

[viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/02/Food-Sovereignty-A-guide-Low-Res-Vresion.pdf](http://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/02/Food-Sovereignty-A-guide-Low-Res-Vresion.pdf)

### **Objectives:**

1. To understand the basic concepts of food sovereignty
2. To understand what food sovereignty looks like for farm workers.

### **What is food sovereignty?**

Food Sovereignty offers itself as a process of building social movements and empowering peoples to organise their societies in ways that transcend the neoliberal vision of a world of commodities, markets, and selfish economic actors. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the myriad of complex problems we face in today's world. Instead, Food Sovereignty is a process that adapts to the people and places where it is put in practice. Food Sovereignty means solidarity, not competition, and building a fairer world from the bottom up.

Food is also political – the production of, access to, and distribution of food are essential for our society to function and control of our food system confers power. Political forces have worked for many years to control all aspects of food production systems and bring the cycle of food production, from seeds, inputs, land, and other necessities under centralized and increasingly privatized control. Trade in foodstuffs – the exchange and transport of food from one human population to another – is also a highly politicized and complex process. Control of the rules and regulations governing international and inter-regional trade confers even greater power and leverage.

In spite of the political and economic pressures they face, human beings continue to manage and nurture the ecosystems around them to ensure a food supply. For thousands of years peasant farmers, pastoralists, and other peoples who live from the land and sea have developed and refined resilient food and water systems, plant and animal breeds, and cultivated plant varieties to ensure their continuation and long term sustainability.

The 20th century saw massive increases in mechanization and the increasing industrialisation of food production. Use of artificial and chemical inputs in farming and food processing have proliferated, and large agricultural companies and neo-colonial states and regions have increased their market share and power.

In the face of these developments, Food Sovereignty has emerged from peasant groups organized at the transnational level as a proposal for humanity to rethink how we organize food and agricultural production, distribution and trade, how we make use of land and aquatic resources, and how we interact, exchange, and organise with one another. Food Sovereignty is not a simple set of technical solutions or a formula which can be applied – it is instead a “process in action” – an invitation to citizens to exercise our capacity to organize ourselves and improve our conditions and societies together.

The concept of Food Sovereignty was developed by the people most threatened by the processes of the consolidation of power in food and agricultural systems, peasant farmers. Instead of being destroyed by the forces of history they are offering a proposal to solve the multiple crises which humanity is facing.

### **The 6 pillars of Food Sovereignty:**

(Developed at the [International Forum for Food Sovereignty in Nyéléni](#), Mali, in 2007.)

- **Focuses on Food for People:** Food sovereignty puts the right to sufficient, healthy, and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples, and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock, and fisheries policies; and rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.
- **Values Food Providers:** Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food; and rejects those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.
- **Localises Food Systems:** Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms; and resists governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.
- **Puts Control Locally:** Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity; it recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities; and rejects the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.
- **Builds Knowledge and Skills:** Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organisations that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations; and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.
- **Works with Nature:** Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us; and, rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

## Reflection Questions:

1. Where does the produce in your local grocery store come from - local farms or further away?
2. Does your local grocery store carry culturally appropriate foods for all the nationalities that live in your community?
3. Does EVERYONE in your community have access to healthy, culturally appropriate food? Housing? Transportation? Living wage jobs?

## Action Ideas:

- Support farm worker cooperatives or grown produce (if you can):  
<https://riverheadlocal.com/2021/05/03/long-island-farmworkers-launch-cooperative-we-can-grow-our-own-futures/>
- Support CSA's and local produce to reduce supporting industrial agriculture:
  - a. Use this link to find a CSA near you: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/csas>
  - b. Use this link to find a farmers market near you:  
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets>
- Adopt a seed(s) and start growing your food to strengthen local production. Experience the joy of eating homegrown food. Send us or share with the following hashtags **#TimeToTransform #FoodSovereigntyNow** (complete it with your own message) a video or a photo(s) of you doing this act of resistance against corporate capture of our food system
- Request your local community leaders support local food production and buy from local food markets to strengthen the local food systems.
- Put pressure on governments to prioritize food sovereignty in public policies and implement the UN Declaration of Rights of Peasants and other people working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).

## Further Reading:

- <https://foodfirst.org/publication/a-democratic-food-system-means-unions-for-farmworkers/>
- <https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/the-six-pillars-of-food-sovereignty/>
- [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dt0hicyhGdJ5KIC3qyE1AbG9fdDrONjUh\\_M\\_bE0KMGs/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dt0hicyhGdJ5KIC3qyE1AbG9fdDrONjUh_M_bE0KMGs/edit)

## Prayer:

God of all creation, human and plant, earth and sky,

We rejoice that you created the world a place where people can have their needs met.

Make us mindful that the earth has many gifts to give us strength and health.

Help us embrace food as a right for every person  
and remove barriers that limit access.

May we strive to see that everyone in the food chain has fair pay, good working conditions and is valued for what they contribute to feed us all.

Give us joy in sharing our lives, farmer and consumer, farm worker and family,  
cook and salesperson, server and driver.

Bring opportunities to share recipes and techniques,  
experiences and traditions that will enhance our eating  
and deepen our love for each other.

Food is life and health and love.

May we share it in peace as we eat together the food of justice.

Amen.