

FOOD REBELLIONS: SEVEN STEPS TO SOLVING THE FOOD CRISIS¹

Eric Holt-Gimenez[©]

The World Food Program describes the current global food crisis as a silent tsunami, with billions of people going hungry. Hunger is, indeed, coming in waves, but not everyone will drown in famine. The recurrent food crises are making a handful of corporations very rich—even as they put the rest of the planet at risk. Built over half a century, largely with public grain subsidies and foreign aid, the global food-industrial complex is made up of large corporations that sell grain, seed, chemicals, and fertilizer, along with global supermarket chains and food processors.

When these players first came on the scene, world agriculture was different. Forty years ago, the global South had yearly agricultural trade surpluses of \$1 billion. After three “Development Decades,” they were importing \$11 billion a year in food. Immediately following de-colonization in the 1960s, Africa exported \$1.3 billion in food a year. Today it imports 25 percent of its food. International trade agreements and pressure from the global North opened up entire continents to cheap, subsidized grain from the North. This put local farmers out of business, devastated local crop diversity, and consolidated control of the world’s food system in the hands of multinational corporations. Today three companies, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Cargill, and Bunge control 90 percent of the world’s grain trade.

The official prescriptions for solving the world food crisis call for more subsidies for industrialized nations, more food aid, and more so-called Green (or Gene) Revolutions. Expecting the institutions that built the current flawed food system to solve the food crisis is like asking an arsonist to put out a forest fire. When the world food crisis exploded in early 2008, ADM’s profits increased by 38 percent, Cargill’s by 128 percent, and Mosaic Fertilizer (a Cargill subsidiary) by a whopping 1,615 percent!

For decades, family farmers the world over have resisted this corporate control. They have worked to diversify crops, protect soil and native seeds, and conserve nature. They have established local gardens, businesses, and community-based food systems. These strategies are effective. They need to be given a chance to work. The solutions to the food crisis are those that make the lives of family farmers easier: re-regulate the market, reduce the power of the agri-foods industrial complex, and build ecologically resilient family agriculture. Here are some of the needed steps:

- (1) Support domestic food production.
- (2) Stabilize and guarantee fair prices to farmers and consumers by re-establishing floor prices and publicly owned national grain reserves. Establish living wages for workers on farms, in processing facilities, and in supermarkets.
- (3) Halt agrofuels expansion.
- (4) Curb speculation in food.

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- (5) Promote a return to smallholder farming. On a pound-per-acre basis, family farms are more productive than large-scale industrial farms. And they use less oil. Because 75 percent of the world's poor are farmers, this will address poverty, too.
- (6) Support agro-ecological production.
- (7) Food sovereignty: Recognize the right of all people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound methods and their own food systems.

The political will to take these steps must come from informed social movements. These movements already exist, and are gaining strength in the face of the food crisis. Together we can fix the food system and solve the food crisis once and for all.