

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1528>



Neoliberalism

# Facing the food crisis: what alternatives?

- IV Online magazine - 2008 - IV404 - September 2008 -

Publication date: Thursday 25 September 2008

---

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

---

**The food crisis has left thousands of people worldwide without food. With statistics showing 850 million hungry, the World Bank estimates that the current crisis increases that number by a hundred more. This 'tsunami' of hunger is no natural process, but stems from the neoliberal policies of international institutions, imposed over decades.**



### **Coconut palm used to convert it into bio-diesel**

As we face this situation, what alternatives are being proposed? Is it possible to adopt different models of food production, distribution and consumption? Before covering these questions, let's address some of the principal structural problems which have generated the situation.

In the first place, hunger can be traced to the pillage of community's natural resources. Earth, water, seeds - all have been privatized, no longer public goods. Food production has been displaced from family farming to agricultural industry, and has been transformed into a means of capital enrichment. The fundamental value of food, to nourish us, has been diminished to its market value. For this reason, although there is presently more food than ever before, people are denied access to the abundance, unable to pay ever-increasing prices.

If farmers have no lands with which to feed themselves, nor excess crops to sell, then in whose hands is the world's food? It lies in the power of agricultural multinationals, who control all the links of the commercialized chain. Of course, this is not simply a problem of natural resources, but of production models. At present, agriculture can be described as intensive, as 'drug' or 'oil' -dependent, kilometric, de-localized, industrial - in short, the antithesis of an agriculture that respects environment and people.

Secondly, in addition to usurped resources, we face neoliberal policies, applied over decades to favor greater commercial liberalization, the privatization of public services, monetary transfer from South to North (with external debts incurred), etc. The World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank (WB), International Monetary Found (IMF), among others, have been some of the principal architects of the policies.

These policies have allowed Southern markets to open up by favoring subsidized products, which are sold at prices lower than their costs, and further, by permitting prices even lower than those of the autoctonous products, local farming has been effectively finished off. These policies have reduced diversified growing to a small-scale industry beside that of mono-cultivation aimed at exportation.

In third place, we should note the monopoly of food distribution chains. Megasupermarkets like Wal-Mart, Tesco or Carrefour dictate the prices of food products, both what is paid to the farmers, and what is paid by the consumers. In Spain, for example, the average disparity between original and purchase price is 400%, with distributors reaping the greatest benefit. On the other hand, the farmer is receiving less and less pay for his goods, and the consumer is paying more and more for his purchases.

## **Proposals**

However, there are alternatives. As natural resources are reappropriated, agricultural sovereignty must be reclaimed

## Facing the food crisis: what alternatives?

---

- farming communities must regain control of their agricultural policies. Earth, seeds, water - all must be returned to the hands of the farmers, that they might feed themselves and sell their products to their local communities. This requires an integral agrarian reform of both property and production, and the nationalization of natural resources.

Governments must support small-scale production, thereby allowing soils to naturally enrich and renew; saving non-renewable resources; reducing global warming; and allowing independence with respect to human nourishment. At present, we all remain dependent on an international market and on the interests of the agricultural industry.

Returning agriculture into the hands of the family farm is the only route to guaranteeing universal access to foodstuffs. Public policies must promote agriculture that is autoctonous, sustainable, organic, and free of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). For products which are not cultivated locally, the instruments of fair trade must be implemented at an international level. We must protect agro-ecosystems and biodiversity, seriously threatened by the present agricultural model.

In response to neo-liberal policies, we must generate mechanisms and regulations of intervention, which stabilize market prices, control imports, stabilize quotas, prohibit dumping, and in moments of over-production, create specialized reserves for food shortages. At the national level, countries must be independent in deciding how self-sufficient their production will be, and must prioritize the food production for domestic use.

Along the same lines, we must reject those policies imposed by WB, IMF and WTO, the treaties of free bilateral and regional trade, as well as prohibiting financial speculation, the trading of food futures, and the large-scale production of agrofuels. It's necessary to end with the North-South domination mechanisms such as the external debt and to fight agro-corporate power.

In front of large-scale distribution monopolies, we must demand regulation and transparency throughout the chain of production and commercialization. Large-scale distribution has highly negative effects on farmers, suppliers, and workers, on environment, and on consumption. For this reason, we must seek alternatives at the stage of purchase: going to local markets, forming part of organic agricultural cooperatives, supporting short-circuit commercialization - with a positive effect on the land and a direct relationship with those who work it.

We are obliged to make advances, too, toward responsible consumption. For example, were the whole world to consume as does a United States citizen, we would require five land-locked planets just to satisfy the needs of our world population. And yet, personal change is not sufficient if it goes unaccompanied by collective political action grounded in a solidarity between country and city. If lands are left without resources or populations, eventually there will be no one remaining to work them, and no one to feed us all. The building of a flourishing rural world directly concerns the city-dweller.

And finally, we must establish alliances between the various sectors affected by capitalist globalization, and we must take action politically. Healthy food will not be possible without legislation to prohibit transgenics, or indiscriminate logging practices. Neither will stop if those multinationals who exploit the environment are not stopped - and for all of this to happen, we need legislation which addresses and prioritizes the needs of people and of ecosystems, instead of economic incentive.

A paradigm shift in food production, distribution and consumption will only be possible with broader political, economic and social transformation. We must create alliances among the world's oppressed: farmers, workers, women, immigrants, and youths - if we are to achieve the "other possible world" to which all social movements aspire.

## Facing the food crisis: what alternatives?

---

*\* Article published at América Latina en Movimiento (ALAI), n°433. Translated into English by Danielle Hill.*