

MAKING ROOM FOR ALTERNATIVES

*How to Move from an Industrial Agriculture/Biotech Model
to a Local Sustainable System that Supports People and the Planet.*

"Modern agriculture" has become "one of the major threats to the indigenous and local communities as well as to biodiversity, healthy ecosystems, and food security." —The United Nations Environment Program.

Industrial agriculture—i.e., large-scale, corporate-run, export-oriented monoculture farming—is the primary cause of landlessness, hunger, and food insecurity in the world today. The industrial agriculture model has undermined small-scale, diversified, self-reliant, sustainable, community-based agriculture systems the world-over with devastating results on people, communities and the environment. The world simply can not sustain this model.

To address this problem, the International Forum on Globalization (IFG) brought together 19 of the leading experts and activists on corporate globalization to write *Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Better World is Possible*. This book documents alternative agriculture systems that exist today and creates a road map of the policy changes necessary to replace industrial agriculture with traditional sustainable agricultural models. This policy "road map" is described below.

SIX CENTRAL CONVICTIONS FOR AGRICULTURE POLICY

1. Access to land for self-reliant food growing is a fundamental human right; it cannot be denied to communities or nations by global trade regimes or in the interests of international trade processes.
2. Loss of small holders' farmlands to highly concentrated large corporations is a primary cause of poverty and hunger in the world, as well as of environmental devastation.
3. Wherever people are still living and working on their traditional lands, incentives and policies should help them remain in place, working for their families and communities, not the global market. Where communities have been deprived of their lands, distributive land reform is crucial.
4. The bias of international bureaucracies like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) toward large-scale, export-oriented monocultural production must be reversed. Invigorating small farms and indigenous agricultural practices that protect local biodiversity and innovation devoted to sustainable use for local populations must be encouraged.
5. Solutions must serve to shorten the distance between producer and consumer.
6. The ultimate sustainable agriculture solution is transition to noncorporate, small-scale organic farming as practiced for millennia.

EIGHT KEY POLICY CHANGES TO BRING THESE CONVICTIONS INTO PRACTICE

1. *Permit tariffs and import quotas that favor local agriculture.*

Apply the principle of subsidiarity: whenever production can be achieved by local farmers, using local resources for local consumption, all rules and benefits should favor that option. New rules must permit the judicious use of trade tariffs and import quotas to regulate imports of food that can be produced locally.

2. *Reverse the rules on intellectual property and patenting.*

The Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) Agreement of the WTO should be abandoned to permit reassertion of rules that favor the needs of local and domestic communities and the protection of innovations and knowledge developed over centuries, as well as to deal with public health crises.

3. *Localize food regulations and standards.*

In the name of food safety, many international rules have enforced a kind of processing of foods that works directly against local and artisanal food producers while favoring the global food giants. Such rules tremendously increase costs for small producers and consumers, and also negatively affect taste and quality. Food production standards should be localized and every nation permitted to set high standards for food safety.

4. *Allow farmer marketing-supply management boards.*

Currently disallowed by the WTO and NAFTA, these price and supply regulations let farmers negotiate collective prices with domestic and foreign buyers to help ensure that they receive a decent price for the commodities.

5. *Eliminate direct export subsidies and payments for corporations.*

Although the WTO has eliminated direct payment programs for most small farmers, they allow export subsidies to agribusinesses. Such subsidies help multinational corporations dominate smaller local businesses both domestically and abroad. These export subsidy policies should be eliminated, and programs that permit and encourage low-interest loans to small farmers, creation of domestic seed banks, and emergency food supply systems should be allowed.

6. *Recognize the failure of WTO Market Access Rules.*

Some activists strongly argue that developing countries must have market access as promised, to level the playing field. But others believe that the entire export model is doomed because it is destructive to basic self-sufficient traditional farming. These divergent viewpoints have led to a partial rift among activists, depending upon whether one feels the situation is now so desperate that market access can provide the only quick fix or whether one takes a longer view toward a paradigm of community self-sufficiency.

Still, most activists who advocate for agricultural self-sufficiency acknowledge that in the short term, many Southern nations remain dependent on agricultural exports to the North. Hence, they recognize that transition strategies are needed to help nations that often feel trapped in colonial trade patterns to shift toward greater food security and self-sufficiency. Most of the members of the IFG feel the WTO is probably an unsustainable institution and that these issues would be better dealt with by a less corporate-oriented bureaucracy—one that embraces the ten principles for sustainable societies presented in *Alternatives to Economic Globalization*.

7. *Promote land reform.*

History shows that the redistribution of land to landless and land-poor rural families is an effective way to improve rural welfare. According to the Institute for Food and Development Policy (Food First), when a significant portion of quality land was distributed to a majority of rural poor, with policies favorable to successful family farming, and when the power of rural elites was broken, there have been measurable poverty reduction and improvement of human welfare.

Food First lists the following crucial ingredients that must apply if land reform is to be successful: Government grants of land must be debt free; women must have full rights of title and use; only good quality land should be used (past failures have often resulted when lands were of poor quality); there must be a highly supportive policy environment—reasonable credit terms and good infrastructures for sound local environment technologies; there must be easy access to markets; the power of rural elites must be broken so they can no longer block and distort policies, subsidies, and profits in their favor; reforms must apply to the majority of the rural poor so they have sufficient strength in numbers to be politically effective; most important, a new farm economy should be the centerpiece of a country's entire economic development model. When land reform is viewed as welfare, failure is inevitable.

8. *Change the grassroots.*

There are many opportunities for local communities to assist the transition away from globalized agriculture. The International Society for Ecology and Culture lists several opportunities, already well under way in some places: buy local campaigns, farmers' markets, local food co-ops, community banks and loan funds, local currencies, urban gardens and seed-sharing co-ops. Of course, there are different opportunities in the North and the South. ♣