

# Fixing our Global Food System

## *Food Sovereignty and Redistributive Land Reform*

PETER ROSSET

The recent world food price crisis highlights what many have thought for a long time: the world's food and agriculture system is broken. Few winners remain in the aftermath of the severe crisis, in which prices for basic food commodities (corn, wheat, rice, soybeans) increased dramatically in 2007 and 2008, only to fall rapidly in the second half of 2008. Although down from their high points, commodity prices are still about double those of the early 2000s. Consumer prices in all countries have remained high, while farmers failed to benefit much from the price hikes, due to high prices for agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilizers, and they are now hurt by falling crop prices.<sup>1</sup> The real people in the system, whether family farmers or peasants, or the rest of us who just consume food, can't ever win, it seems. It is always the middlemen—an ever smaller array of global corporations—that “make the killing” in terms of windfall profits.<sup>2</sup>

When we bring this system down to earth, literally to the land that is farmed around the world, and the question of *who* farms it, what we find is a clash of two models of agricultural production. The dominant model, which generated the recent crisis, consists of industrial monocultures produced by agribusiness, whether in Iowa in the United States, Brazil, Mali, Spain, India, or Thailand. Unfortunately for local consumers in any of these countries, agribusiness does not typically produce food for local populations, rather, agribusiness has an *export vocation*. Either commodities are produced for export markets, or biomass is grown to produce ethanol or biodiesel to feed cars instead of human beings. Thus Brazilian agribusiness, for example, is far more likely to feed cattle and cars in Europe, than it is to feed Brazilians in Brazil.

Just as troubling is the technology that agribusiness uses: heavy machinery, mega-irrigation, insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, GMOs,

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and chemical fertilizers. This monoculture technology actually produces far less per hectare than does diversified small farm agriculture, and in the process destroys the productive capacity of the land.<sup>3</sup> Soils are eroded, compacted, sterilized and increasingly infertile, and pests become resistant to ever-rising doses of pesticides. This kind of agriculture is heavily dependent on petroleum. Yet in light of the recent food price crisis, we can scarcely afford to maintain production technologies that perpetuate the link between oil prices and food prices. While the price of a barrel of petroleum has dropped, it will certainly not stay down forever. Thus we urgently need the kind of ecologically sound farming practices that are far more compatible with small farm agriculture.

In contrast to agribusiness, family farmers and peasants typically do produce food for local and national markets. In country after country, the proportion of food coming from the small farm sector is far greater than—typically more than double—the proportion of land that is actually in the hands of small farmers.<sup>4</sup> These farmers are over-represented in food production, and under-represented in export and agrofuel production because they have a *food-producing vocation*. Yet the continued growth of the dominant model directly undermines food production, driving small farmers off the land and into migrant streams. As Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas has put it, the “model of death”—agribusiness and industrial monoculture—is destroying the “model of life,” i.e., peasant and family farm production of food.

In order to reverse these trends and provide a life with dignity for farming peoples, protect rural environments, and correct the structural causes of the food crisis, we need to revitalize family and peasant farming. That means restoring the public sector rural budgets that were cut under neoliberal policies, restoring minimum price guarantees, credit and other forms of support, and undertaking redistributive agrarian reform. The peasant and family farm sectors in most countries cannot be rebuilt without land reform, which redistributes land from export elites to food-producing peasants and family farmers. This is a central pillar of the alternative proposal for our food and agriculture systems that is put forth by the international farmers’ movement.

### **Food Sovereignty**

Many of the world’s organizations of family farmers, peasants, landless rural workers, indigenous people, rural youth, and rural women have joined together in a global alliance, La Vía Campesina.<sup>5</sup> According

to *Vía Campesina*, we are facing an historic clash between two models of economic, social, and cultural development for the rural world, and *Vía Campesina* has proposed an alternative policy paradigm called *food sovereignty*.<sup>6</sup> Food sovereignty starts with the concept of economic and social human rights, which include the right to food, but it goes further, arguing that there is a corollary right to land and a “right to produce” for rural peoples.

Food sovereignty argues that feeding a nation’s people is an issue of national security—of sovereignty, if you will. If the population of a country must depend for their next meal on the vagaries and price swings of the global economy, on the goodwill of a superpower not to use food as a weapon, or on the unpredictability and high cost of long-distance shipping, then that country is not secure, neither in the sense of national security nor in the sense of food security. Food sovereignty thus goes beyond the concept of food security, which says nothing about where food comes from or how it is produced. To achieve genuine food sovereignty, people in rural areas must have access to productive land and receive prices for their crops that allow them to make a decent living, while feeding their nation’s people.

But it also means that access to land and productive resources is not enough. The current emphasis in trade negotiations on market access for exports, to the detriment of protection of domestic markets for domestic producers, is a critical problem. According to *Vía Campesina*, food sovereignty gives priority of market access to local producers. Liberalized agricultural trade, which gives access to markets on the basis of market power and low, often subsidized, prices, denies local producers access to their own markets, forcing farmers to curtail production and undercutting local and regional economic development.<sup>7</sup> One way to promote local economic development in rural areas is to recreate local circuits of production and consumption, where family farmers sell their produce in local towns and villages and buy other necessities from artisans and merchants in those towns. As has clearly been demonstrated in a recent landmark study in Brazil, the presence of agrarian reform settlements, often as a result of land occupations by peasant movements, boosts local economies, even when a country lacks a comprehensive agrarian reform policy.<sup>8</sup>

Only by changing development tracks from the export-led, free trade-based, industrial agriculture model of large farms, land concentration, and displacement of peoples can we stop the downward spiral of poverty, low wages, rural-urban migration, environmental degradation,

and food crisis. Redistributive land reform and a reversal of dominant trade policies hold the promise of change toward a smaller farm, family-based or cooperative model, with the potential to feed people, lead to broad-based economic development, and conserve biodiversity and productive resources. In this context, it is useful to review current developments in agrarian reform.

## **Ongoing Agrarian Reforms**

### **The 'Official' Reforms**

For the past decade or more, the World Bank has been taking the lead in promoting, and in some cases financing, comprehensive “reforms” of land tenure, including titling, ownership mapping and land registries, land market facilitation, market-assisted or negotiated redistributive reforms, and credit, technical assistance, and marketing support. While they call this “land reform,” and thus have thankfully made it no longer a “taboo” to use that phrase, all of these are actually elements in privatizing land and transforming it from a collective right of rural people into a commodity that is bought and sold, where money is the key to access to land. In this policy environment, national and regional institutions, including governments, aid agencies, and other development banks, are following the lead of the World Bank and aggressively implementing some, or, in certain cases, all of these reforms.<sup>9</sup>

The Bank’s land policies largely fail to address the underlying causes of poverty and exclusion because of their market-based methods, which in many cases have made things worse. Land titling programs can lead to new land loss, as in Thailand, where people who had enjoyed continuous access to land for generations suddenly lost it when given saleable titles in the midst of a national economic crisis. In Mexico, the demarcation of private parcels on what was once collective land has produced violent conflicts between neighbors, where peaceful coexistence was once the norm. Furthermore, the supposed beneficiaries of Bank-funded land credits are strapped with heavy debts for expensive land of dubious quality as in Guatemala and Brazil. Worst of all, market-based “solutions” tend to depoliticize the problem of landlessness, which by its nature can only be resolved by structural changes that can only be addressed in the sphere of politics, rather than the market. Finally, these “reforms” leave intact the neoliberal policy environment and its underlying model, both inimical to family agriculture. We can hope for little positive change, then, from these efforts.<sup>10</sup>

### State-Led Land Reforms

“In every Latin American case where significant land redistribution benefiting the rural poor took place, the state played a decisive role,” wrote the late land reform theorist Solon Barraclough.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, he also wrote, the state also played a critical role in every case where reform was denied or deformed.

On the positive side, progressive governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Nepal have all made commitments to take further steps in already well-advanced reforms (i.e., Cuba), or to develop new ones.

Whereas Cuba’s original revolutionary land reform took place in the 1960s, a later “reform within the reform” allowed Cuba to escape from a food crisis in the 1990s, in what may be the closest example of a true transition from agro-export toward a more food sovereignty-centered model of the kind called for by *Vía Campesina*. When Cuba faced the shock of the collapse of the socialist bloc, food production initially collapsed due to the loss of imported fertilizer, pesticides, tractors, parts, petroleum, etc. The situation was so bad that Cuba posted the worst record in all of Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of the annual rate of growth of per capita food production (–5.1 percent for the period from 1986 through 1995, against a regional average of –0.2 percent). But as Cuba re-oriented its agricultural sector, becoming a world-class case of ecological agriculture along the way, it rebounded to show the best performance in all of Latin America and the Caribbean, a remarkable rate of 4.2 percent annual growth in per capita food production from 1996 through 2005 (the most recent year for which statistics are available), a period in which the regional average growth rate was zero percent.<sup>12</sup>

The important factor in boosting food production was, first of all, access to land by the rural majority. This second land reform—to break up state farms into smaller, cooperative and individual production units—was possible because the earlier expropriation of landlords had already taken place. Second of all, the *de facto* protection from dumping, provided by the U.S. trade embargo, provided a positive condition (albeit for a very negative reason), in that higher prices for farmers provided the economic viability and incentives needed for agriculture itself to survive the crisis.

Other key factors included state support for the transition (shifts in credit, research, extension education, etc., to support the new model), a highly organized rural sector that made the rapid dissemination of change possible, and the existence of autochthonous, agroecological

technology.<sup>13</sup> By combining accumulated peasant knowledge with research from scientific institutions, Cuba was able to break dependence on no longer available imported inputs.<sup>14</sup> Sadly, food production lagged again in the later 2000s, as so-called “humanitarian” food purchases by Cuba from the United States depressed national production. With the recent hikes in global prices, however, the government of Raul Castro has made a renewed commitment to food sovereignty and agrarian reform.

The case of Venezuela, however, is still very much up in the air. While the government of President Chávez has made clear its commitment to agrarian reform, a number of factors have so far conspired to restrain progress.<sup>15</sup> These include the resistance of landlords and bureaucrats and the relative lack of organization of the peasantry into an actor, or at least an active subject, to push land reform. In Bolivia landlords are actively and violently resisting Evo Morales’s “agrarian revolution,” with overt and covert support from the United States.

### **Land Reform from Below**

The majority of the countries in the world do not enjoy governments committed to state-led redistribution of land based on expropriation, with or without compensation to former landowners. This is the fundamental cause behind the phenomenal rise in land occupations and reclamations—land reform from below—being carried by a new generation of sophisticated social movements around the world.

In Indonesia, some 1 million hectares of land have been occupied by landless peasants since the end of the Suharto dictatorship. Of this land, approximately 50 percent was land formerly held in tree crop plantations (such as rubber or oil palm), 30 percent was in corporate timber plantations, and the remainder was a mixture of state-owned land and tourism development areas. About three-quarters of the occupations have been reclamations of land previously occupied decades ago by the same villages before they were displaced, often violently, to make way for plantations; the other one-quarter have been new occupations. This is a positive development that stands in marked contrast to recent government-assisted, massive corporate land grabs to plant oil palm for agrofuel exports, which are generating new land conflicts.<sup>16</sup>

In Zimbabwe, as many as 11 million hectares have been transferred in recent years, in large part due to government-supported occupations of large, white-owned estates by black war veterans. While there remains controversy over how much land went to political cronies, there is little doubt that a major, world-class transfer of assets to poor people occurred,



even if the government participated for the wrong political reasons.<sup>17</sup> In Brazil, according to the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), by 2002 some 8 million hectares of land have been occupied and settled by some 1 million people, most newly engaged in farming. Other countries with escalating land occupations include Paraguay, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Argentina, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, India, Thailand, South Africa, and others.<sup>18</sup>

This tactic of land occupation is one of the central tactics in the contemporary struggle for land reform. The MST has set the standard for other landless people's movements around the world. They are noted for both their success in occupying land—as measured by the amount of land occupied, the number of people settled, and a rate of abandonment of the settlements that remains well below 10 percent of new settlers—as well as for the sophisticated nature of their internal organization. The MST uses a two-step method to move people from extreme poverty into landownership and farming. They begin by reaching out to the most excluded and impoverished segments of Brazilian society, such as landless rural day laborers, urban homeless people, people with substance abuse problems, unemployed rural slum dwellers, or peasant farmers who have lost their land. Organizers give talks in community centers, churches, and other public forums, and landless families are given the opportunity to sign up for a land occupation.

Step one sees these families move into rural “camps,” where they live on the side of highways in shacks made from black plastic, until a suitable estate—typically land left unused by absentee landlords—is found. Families spend at least six months, and sometimes as long as five years, living under the harsh conditions of the camps, with little privacy, enduring heat in the summer and cold in the rainy season. As the MST discovered almost by accident, however, the camps are the key step in forging new people out of those with tremendous personal issues to overcome. Camp discipline, which is communally imposed by camp members, prohibits drug use, domestic violence, excessive drinking, and a host of other social ills. All families must help look after each other's children—who play together—and everyone must cooperate in communal duties. People learn to live cooperatively, and they receive intensive training in literacy, public health, farming, administration of co-ops, and other key skills that can make their future farm communities successful. When people used to occupy land directly, they usually failed to stay more than few months. But when they have first been through an MST camp, more than 90 percent of them stay on their land long term.

Step two is the actual land occupation. It usually takes place at dawn, when security guards and police are asleep, and it involves anywhere from dozens to thousands of families rapidly moving out of their camp onto the estate they will occupy. Crops are planted immediately, communal kitchens, schools, and a health clinic are set up, and defense teams trained in nonviolence secure the perimeter against the hired gunmen, thugs, and assorted police forces that the landlord usually calls down upon them. The actual occupation leads to a negotiation with local authorities, the result of which may be the expropriation (with compensation) of the property under Brazil's constitutional provision requiring the social use of land, or the negotiated exchange of the occupied parcel for a different one of equal value. In some cases security forces have managed to expel the occupiers, who typically return and occupy the parcel again and again until an accommodation is reached.

### **The Case for Redistributive Land Reform**

The redistribution of land can fulfill a number of functions in more sustainable models of development.<sup>19</sup> Among them are poverty reduction, economic development, food production, and environmental stewardship. Today we have a new opportunity to learn the lessons of past reforms and apply them to the practical goals of development. Land reform is back on the agenda, thanks to grassroots movements, progressive governments, and the food crisis. Here we look at the important roles that redistributive land reform can play in the move toward more sustainable development.

#### **Land Reform and Poverty**

History shows that the redistribution of land to landless and land-poor rural families can be a very effective way to improve rural welfare. In the outcome of virtually every land reform program carried out in the third world since the Second World War we can distinguish between what is called "radical" redistribution or "genuine land reform," and "non-egalitarian" reforms or "fake land reform." When quality land has been truly redistributed to the poor, and the power of the rural oligarchy to distort and "capture" policies was broken, real, measurable poverty reduction and improvement in human welfare have invariably been the result. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Cuba, and China are all good examples. In contrast, countries with reforms that gave only poor quality land to beneficiaries, and/or failed to alter the rural power structures that work against the poor, have failed to make a major dent in rural poverty or food production.



Successful reforms trigger relatively broad-based economic development. By including the poor in economic development, they build domestic markets to support national economic activity. The often tragic outcome of failed reforms is to condemn the supposed beneficiaries to further marginalization from national economic life, as they frequently assume heavy debts to pay for the poor quality land they receive in remote locations, without credit or access to markets, and in policy environments hostile to small farmers.

More recently, it turns out that people in land reform settlements in Brazil earn more than they did before, and more than landless families still do. They eat better and have greater purchasing power and greater access to educational opportunities. They are more likely to be able to unite their families in one place, rather than lose family members to migration. In fact, genuine land reform holds promise as a means to stem the rural-urban migration that is causing third world cities to grow beyond the capacity of urban economies to provide enough jobs.

Another way of looking at it is in terms of the cost of creating a new job. Estimates of the cost of creating a job in the commercial sector of Brazil range from 2 to 20 times more than the cost of establishing an unemployed head of household on farmland, through agrarian reform. Land reform beneficiaries in Brazil have an annual income equivalent to 3.7 minimum wages, while still landless laborers average only 0.7 of the minimum. Infant mortality among families of beneficiaries has dropped to only half of the national average.

This provides a powerful argument that land reform in order to create a small farm economy is not only good for local economic development, but is also more effective social policy than allowing business-as-usual to keep driving the poor out of rural areas and into burgeoning cities. Only land reform holds the potential to address chronic underemployment in most third world countries. Because small farms use more labor—and often less capital—to farm a given unit of area, a small farm model can absorb far more people into gainful activity and reverse the stream of out-migration from rural areas.

### **Land Reform and Productivity**

In the past there was a longstanding debate concerning the likely impacts of the redistribution of farm land to the poor, which almost inevitably has led on the average to smaller production units. One concern was that, when freed from exploitative share-cropping, rental, or labor relationships, the poor would retain a greater proportion of their

own production for their own consumption, not necessarily a bad thing, but leading to a net decrease in food availability for other consumers. However, this argument has been put to rest by the evidence, demonstrating the productivity gains that can be achieved by shifting to smaller-scale, more intensive styles of production.

In Brazil, family farm agriculture produces 24 percent of the total national value of production of beef, 24 percent of milk, 58 percent of pork, and 40 percent of poultry and eggs. It also generates 33 percent of cotton, 31 percent of rice, 72 percent of onions, 67 percent of green beans, 97 percent of tobacco, 84 percent of cassava, 49 percent of maize, 32 percent of soya, 46 percent of wheat, 58 percent of bananas, 27 percent of oranges, 47 percent of grapes, 25 percent of coffee, and 10 percent of sugar. In total, family farm agriculture accounts for 40 percent of the total national value of production, while occupying just 30.5 percent of the cultivated land area. They generate fully 76.9 percent of the national employment in agriculture, all while receiving only 25.3 percent of farm credit.

In fact, data shows that small farms almost always produce far more agricultural output per unit area than larger farms, do so more efficiently, and produce food rather than export crops and fuels. This holds true whether we are talking about industrial countries or any country in the third world. This is widely recognized by agricultural economists as the “inverse relationship between farm size and output.” When I examined the relationship between farm size and total output for fifteen countries in the third world, in all cases relatively smaller farm sizes were much more productive per unit area—2 to 10 times more productive—than larger ones.<sup>20</sup> Thus re-distributive land reform is not likely to run at cross-purposes with productivity concerns.

But surely more tons of grain is not the only goal of farm production; farm resources must also generate wealth for the overall improvement of rural life—including better housing, education, health services, transportation, local economic diversification, and more recreational and cultural opportunities.

In the United States, the question was asked more than a half-century ago: what does the growth of large-scale, industrial agriculture mean for rural towns and communities? Walter Goldschmidt’s classic 1940s study of California’s San Joaquin Valley compared areas dominated by large corporate farms with those still characterized by smaller, family farms.<sup>21</sup>

In farming communities dominated by large corporate farms, nearby towns died off. Mechanization meant that fewer local people were

employed, and absentee ownership meant that farm families themselves were no longer to be found. In these corporate-farm towns, the income earned in agriculture was drained off into larger cities to support distant enterprises, while in towns surrounded by family farms, the income circulated among local business establishments, generating jobs and community prosperity. Where family farms predominated, there were more local businesses, paved streets and sidewalks, schools, parks, churches, clubs, newspapers, better services, higher employment, and more civic participation. Studies conducted since Goldschmidt's original work confirm that his findings remain true today.

The Amish and Mennonite farm communities found in the eastern United States provide a strong contrast to the virtual devastation described by Goldschmidt in corporate farm communities. Lancaster County in Pennsylvania, which is dominated by small farmers who eschew much modern technology and often even bank credit, is the most productive farm county east of the Mississippi River. It has annual gross sales of agricultural products of \$700 million, and receives an additional \$250 million from tourists who appreciate the beauty of traditional small farm landscapes.

If we turn toward the third world, we find a similar situation. On the one hand we see the devastation caused by land concentration and the industrialization of agriculture, while on the other there are the local benefits to be derived from a small farm economy that can be created by agrarian reform, or even by "land reform from below" in the form of land occupations.

In Brazil, local towns benefit from the commerce that is generated when estates belonging to absentee landlords are turned into productive family and cooperative farming enterprises through land reform driven from below. A study of one such municipality, *Julho de Castilhos*, found that while the MST settlement possessed only 0.7 percent of the land, its members paid 5 percent of the taxes, making this settlement into the municipality's second largest rural taxpayer.<sup>22</sup>

It is clear that local and regional economic development can benefit from a small farm economy, as can the life and prosperity of rural towns. But what of national economic development? History has shown us that a relatively equitable, small farmer-based rural economy provides the basis for strong national economic development. This "farmer road to development" is part of the reason why, for example, the Northern United States early in its history developed more rapidly and evenly than did Latin America, with its inequitable land distribution characterized

by huge haciendas and plantations interspersed with poverty-stricken subsistence farmers. In the early decades of the Northern United States (in contrast to the plantation system in the South), independent “yeoman” farmers formed a vibrant domestic market for manufactured products from urban areas, including farm implements, clothing, and other necessities. This domestic demand fueled economic growth in the urban areas, and the combination gave rise to broad-based growth.

The postwar experiences of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan in the capitalist world, and China, Cuba, and more recently, Vietnam, in what remains of the “actually-existing socialist” world, also demonstrate how equitable land distribution fuels economic development. At the end of the Second World War, circumstances including devastation and foreign occupation conspired to create the conditions for “radical” land reforms in the former countries—while revolutions did the same in the latter—breaking the economic stranglehold of the landholding class over rural economic life. Combined with trade protection to keep farm prices high, and targeted investment in rural areas, farm families rapidly achieved a high level of purchasing power, which guaranteed domestic markets for fledging industries.

The postwar economic “miracles” of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan were each fueled at the start by internal markets centered in rural areas, long before the advent of the much heralded “export orientation” policies, which later pushed those industries to compete in the global economy. This was a real triumph for “bubble-up” economics, in which redistribution of productive assets to the poorest strata of society created the economic basis for rapid, relatively inclusive development. While this analysis in no way is meant to suggest that all policies pursued by these countries were positive or should be blindly replicated, their experience does stand in stark contrast to the failure of “trickle down” economics to achieve much of anything in the same time period in areas more completely under U.S. dominance, including much of Latin America. More generally, there is now a growing consensus among mainstream development economists, long called for by many in civil society, that inequality in asset distribution impedes economic growth.

A key distinction is between “transformative” agrarian reforms and others.<sup>23</sup> In most redistributive reforms, those who actually receive land are at least nominally better off than those who remain landless—unless and until policies inimical to small farm agriculture lead them to lose their land once again. However, certain agrarian reforms have been the key step in allowing entire nations to change development tracks. In

these cases countries have “jumped” from the excluding, downward spiral into poverty and environmental degradation, to the upward spiral of broad-based improvements in living standards producing strong internal markets, which in turn lead to more dynamic and inclusive economic development—the pattern followed in Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, and elsewhere. Comparative analysis reveals what these transformative reforms—those that led to real social transitions, had in common. In brief, the majority of the landless and land poor benefited, the majority of the arable land was affected, the stranglehold of entrenched power structures over rural life and economy was broken, and favorable, enabling economic policies were put in place. A key feature of the more successful reforms is that farm families were seen as key actors to be mobilized in national economic development—whereas in failed reforms they have typically been seen as indigents in need of charitable assistance.

### **Land Reform and the Environment**

The benefits of small farm economies extend beyond the economic sphere. Whereas large, industrial-style farms impose a scorched-earth mentality on resource management—no trees, no wildlife, endless monocultures—small farmers can be very effective stewards of natural resources and the soil. To begin with, small farmers utilize a broad array of resources and have a vested interest in their sustainability. At the same time, their farming systems are diverse, incorporating and preserving significant functional biodiversity within the farm. By preserving biodiversity, open space and trees, and by reducing land degradation, small farms provide valuable ecosystem services to the larger society.

In the United States, small farmers devote 17 percent of their area to woodlands, compared to only 5 percent on large farms. Small farms maintain nearly twice as much of their land in “soil improving uses,” including cover crops and green manures. In the third world, peasant farmers show a tremendous ability to prevent and even reverse land degradation, including soil erosion. They can and/or do provide important services to society at-large. These include sustainable management of critical watersheds—thus preserving hydrological resources—and the *in situ* conservation, dynamic development and management of the crop and livestock genetic resources upon the which the future food security of humanity depends.

Compared to the ecological wasteland of a modern export plantation, the small farm landscape contains a myriad of biodiversity. The forested

areas from which wild foods, and leaf litter are extracted, the wood lot, the farm itself with intercropping, agroforestry, and large and small livestock, the fish pond, and the backyard garden, all allow for the preservation of hundreds if not thousands of wild and cultivated species. Simultaneously, the commitment of family members to maintaining soil fertility on the family farm means an active interest in long-term sustainability not found on large farms owned by absentee investors. If we are truly concerned about rural ecosystems, then the preservation and promotion of small, family farm agriculture is a crucial step that we must take.

### Conclusion: Land Reform is Back on the Agenda

Thanks in large part to the ongoing struggles of landless peasants around the world, redistributive land reform is very much back on the agenda. Whether we are talking about economic development, correcting structural causes of the food crisis, or conserving productive resources and rural environments, redistributive land reform is an essential part of the comprehensive alternative paradigm that is encompassed by the language of food sovereignty.

### Notes

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— *URPE Summer Conference* —

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*Jenny Brown, TBA*

**FINANCE WITHOUT FINANCIERS:  
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