

Overture to the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Food Sovereignty for All

The Presbytery of Heartland overtures the 221st General Assembly to affirm and support Food Sovereignty, a framework and approach to food and farm systems that addresses the root causes of hunger and poverty globally. Humanity is confronted with the tragedy of hunger in a world that produces enough food for all to eat. PC(USA) church partners and fraternal organizations around the world are calling for food sovereignty as a way of building prosperous, healthy, equitable and sustainable food and farm economies everywhere. This includes supporting fair trade; the right to food and water, access to land; ecological agriculture and health-giving food; more localized decision-making, and equity for everyone throughout the food system.

This overture calls on individuals, congregations, mid councils, and ministries of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly to do the following:

- 1) Pray for people within the food system in the U.S. and overseas, from producers devoting their lives to feeding people but who are often undercompensated and lacking respect, to workers throughout the food chain, and to consumers lacking access to affordable fresh, healthy food
- 2) Study food sovereignty, food justice and other applications of Biblical and Christian values to fairness and sustainability throughout the food system, using educational materials compiled on a single PC(USA) web page.
- 3) Support and participate in community conversations, forums and assemblies where people directly affected by the lack of affordable and healthy food provide significant input and leadership about defining community needs and solutions.
- 4) Support and develop faith-based and other food sovereignty initiatives overseas and in our communities, with special emphasis on impoverished areas, always in concert with those directly affected. Faith-based initiatives in the U.S. may include sponsoring community gardens; hosting farmers markets, community kitchens, market gardens, food microenterprise development and cooperative buying clubs; and promoting purchase of locally and sustainably grown food.
- 5) Work with Presbyterians, PC(USA) partners, as well as interfaith and secular groups and coalitions on initiatives and campaigns whose purpose is to achieve food sovereignty. This may include efforts to reduce negative influences of large multinational corporations on food and farm system practices and on policies that may be detrimental to producers, workers and consumers.
- 6) Join with Presbyterians, PC(USA) partners, and interfaith and secular groups and coalitions working to end large scale land grabs and return unfairly obtained land to communities, and to implement genuine agrarian and aquatic reform programs and base

national and international governance structures on the 'Voluntary Guidelines for Land and Natural Resources Tenure' from the Committee on World Food Security in order to provide secure access to land, forestry and fisheries for communities.

7) Advocate for food, farm and trade policies at all levels that protect family farmers and God's creation, and support the building of just and sustainable local food economies.

RATIONALE:

The PC(USA) recognition of hunger as a problem of inequitable distribution of the abundance of has been on the the forefront of ministry and mission. Working together towards Food Sovereignty is vital in the face of widespread injustice including hunger in the United States and in many other countries. The work of the PC(USA) historically and currently has been one of working toward the fulfillment of the concept of Food Sovereignty for All. The lack of political will, and systems designed to maximize profit rather than ensure the right of food to all have caused a disparity which this denomination has steadfastly addressed. Adopting the concept of Food Sovereignty for All is critical in furthering and fulfilling the Word of Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hear it in his word as well as in the words of the Old Testament prophets and poets, indeed those that follow:

The Word of the Lord: "Happy is the one whose help in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in God the Lord, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry." Psalm 146: 6-7. Blessed be the word of the Lord.

'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' (Matthew 25: 37-40)

Book of Confessions 9.4.c: The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations. The church calls every man to use his abilities, his possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to him by God for the maintenance of his family and the advancement of the common welfare. It encourages those forces in human society that raise men's hopes for better conditions and provide them with the opportunity for a decent living. A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God. (9.4.c)

Background: Food Sovereignty is a set of principles, policies and practices which reflect the "right of all people, communities and countries to define agricultural, food and land policies that are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally relevant. Food

sovereignty holds that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and food-producing resources. This framework calls for actions and strategies on local and global levels to address the root causes of hunger." (Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership, "Food Sovereignty for All: Overhauling the Food System with Faith-Based Initiatives")

Groups such as La Via Campesina, an international movement, is one of the many organizations which addresses the root cause of hunger. It consists of millions of peasants, small and medium scale farmers, women landowners and indigenous persons who are addressing the current food, poverty, and climate crisis.

In 2007, a declaration on Food Sovereignty from the Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Mali, set forth six attributes of the concept. Excerpts follow. (2)

1. Focuses on Food for People: Food sovereignty stresses the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples, and communities. It rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity for international agribusiness.

2. 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 fishers, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples, and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants who cultivate, grow and harvest and process food.

3. Localizes Food Systems as it puts providers and consumers at the center of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets, and resists government structures, agreements and practices that...promote...inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.

4. Makes Decisions Locally: Food Sovereignty seeks control over and access to territory, land, grazing water, seeds, livestock and fish populations for local food providers. These resources ought to be used and shared in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity.

5. Builds Knowledge and Skills: [It] builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organizations that conserve, develop and manage localized food production and harvesting systems, and that pass on this wisdom to future generations. Food Sovereignty rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g., genetic engineering.

6. Works with Nature: [It] seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us; and rejects the methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy-intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialized production methods.

Principles of Food Sovereignty challenge the current model which favors trade of large amounts of food going over borders. The principles also challenge the idea that richer countries and financial organizations should favor themselves over less wealthy countries. The rationale is that if wealthy countries can grow massive amounts of a food, then it should grow it for the world. Meanwhile, low-and middle-income nations may export food (cash crops) to richer nations, leaving them little opportunity to raise their

own nutritious food, as cash crops strip their land and may leave less time and money for self-care. "This logic favors a food industry reliant on industrial-scale farming, monocropping, and massive inputs of fuel, fertilizers, and pesticides. The beneficiaries are the corporate middlepeople who consolidate, arrange, package and ship the food around the world...and profound hidden costs are enacted on our planet as a whole: polluted water, air, and soil, deforestation; acid rain; species extinction; and climate change. The corporate food system wreaks countless ecological harms." (3) (pg 8, 27)

There is a relationship with much of the corporate world and inequity in the social structure. Whereas there are certainly corporations which work to help uphold just practices, there are many which continue to be headed in the opposite direction. Some estimates suggest that half of the world's largest economies are multinational corporations. A key difference between organizations is whether they are essentially profit-making or whether they work to provide a service while remaining economically viable. (Wilkenson, Pickett. The Spirit Level. Pg. 246-7). These authors provide research that suggests that further improvements in the quality of life no longer depend on further economic growth; it depends on "community and how we relate to each other." (p. 247).

In the RELUFA Cameroon Food Sovereignty program, vulnerable communities in the semi-Saharan Far North Province are thriving through their participation in the RELUFA network's Food Sovereignty program. Having been organized to run their own communal grain banks, farmers in 34 villages now ward off speculators at harvest time. Instead of selling their yields to merchants who hoard the produce to maximize profits later in the year, the crops are stored in the village granary. When families run out of their own reserves, they can take grains on in-kind credit and pay back this loan from the next sorghum harvest later in the year. [[Food Sovereignty video](#)]

There are many other examples of models of Food Sovereignty in Presbyterian Hunger Program's Joining Hands program.

Meanwhile, in the United States, many farmworkers are still not afforded adequate rights. Organizations such as the United Farm Workers and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers have made great strides in improving labor conditions. Yet, still often workers "perform strenuous physical labor without the protections of sick leave, overtime pay, or health insurance. They are exempt from the National Labor Relations Act that protects workers' rights to form unions and bargain collectively...Farmworkers are twice as likely to live below the poverty line, and most earn an average of \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year." (ibid) p. 75

The concept of 'land grabs' is of grave concern. "The purchase and lease of vast tracts of land from poor, developing countries by wealthier nations and international private investors has led to debate about whether land investment is a tool for development or force of displacement", reports the Oakland Institute, an independent policy organization working on social and environmental issues such as the land grab. (See www.oaklandinstitute.org)

"Over the last four years, there has been a significant increase in land-based investment, both in terms of the number of investment projects and the total land area allocated. Industrialized nations and private foreign investors have driven demand for arable land in developing regions, particularly in Africa, but also in South America, Central Asia and Southeast Asia. Governments are interested in the lands for purposes of food security and biofuel production. Both governments and private investors are attracted by policy reforms that have improved the investment climate in developing countries, as well as arbitrage opportunities afforded by the extremely low cost of leasing land in these regions.

While only fractions of arable land in developing regions are being used for agriculture, demand for strategic swaths next to irrigation and shipping sites is growing with greater investment. These areas and other lands are frequently in use even though occupants' have no legal rights to the land or access to legal institutions. As demand for land assets increases and governments and multilateral institutions promote investment in national lands, displacement and affected livelihoods are becoming serious sources of international concern." (Oakland Institute).

Water rights are also a huge concern. Access to water and sanitation is a basic human right according to the United Nations General Assembly. Corporate Accountability International notes that human rights to water is a basic obligation of governments. Access is best afforded when the management and control of water is in the hands of the public. They note that "political interference by private water corporations threatens the ability of communities to guarantee the human right to water for all. Attempting to gain a foothold in the water market (estimated to be \$400 billion-plus), global corporations use their vast resources to gain influence in international governing bodies such as the U.N. and funders like the World Bank. The water industry's tactics include promoting policy models that grant more corporate control over water, institutionalizing corporate partnerships with policymakers, weakening regulations and investing in water rights and trading." (stopcorporateabuse.org)

Fair trade versus free trade is a part of the concept as well. A concern at this time is the Trans Pacific Partnership (TTP) free trade agreement, under negotiation among 11 countries. This agreement is largely being negotiated in secret. Many groups including labor unions and churches opposed this agreement. It liberalizes trade possibilities and leads to more of an unregulated market. This would allow corporations to operate with less accountability and rules.