

October 15th, 2019

Statement in Support of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), Agroecology and Small-Scale Food Producers & Against US Obstructionism

Kip Tom

United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome

Dear Honorable Ambassador Tom,

The United Nations (UN) Committee on World Food Security (CFS) has been leading a process to study and implement agroecology around the world to address food security, rural livelihoods, and climate change. As the CFS meets for its 46th annual meeting this week (October 14-18) in Rome, we, the undersigned organizations and our members - representing farmers, food and farm workers, rural communities, and urban communities - strongly support this process and demand that the US government support it as well.

We are deeply concerned by and condemn the United States' repeated obstruction within the CFS and demand that the United States' delegates respect the multilateral process on agroecology, which supports the livelihoods of communities over the economic interests of corporations.

Family farmers, food and farm workers, and rural communities in the United States are suffering from an emerging 21st century farm crisis, the impacts of the climate emergency, and a lack of good, well-paying jobs that can support decent livelihoods in the countryside.

As you have publicly acknowledged at the UN in New York earlier this year, agribusiness consolidation, monopolistic control of large sectors of agricultural economies by a handful of players, and federal policies that incentivize a "get big or get out" model of farming pitting farmers against workers - and even against each other - has decimated rural economies and rural communities. Small family farmers are going out of business, with farmers of color particularly vulnerable, while corporate farms and consolidated supply chains are on the rise. With the average age of a farmer approaching 60, the future of family farming looks bleak. Young people and the millions of landless workers laboring on farms have no path to land ownership or legal protections due to high land values and other farm operating costs. Both urban and rural communities struggle to provide and access healthy food, facing a food system more oriented toward ensuring corporate profits than ensuring the human right to food.

The industrial model of agribusiness, supported by US administrations for many decades, has dumped billions of tons of toxic chemicals on the land, killing soil organisms and polluting the air and water. Factory farms have not only driven smaller family farms out of business but have also poisoned the public's perception of farmers, due to documented animal abuse and drinking water contaminated by runoff, while being a major contributor of atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions and thus a contributor to the global climate crisis.

Family farmers, Native American tribes, and rural communities in the United States have the solutions to these problems because their livelihoods depend on healthy soil, water, and seeds. Through agroecology - defined and led by farmers globally for generations as a science, practice and way of life - food producers and stewards of the land use local knowledge to withstand the impacts of climate change on their food supply, maintaining the supply of fresh, locally produced and adapted foods and ensuring the right to food of surrounding communities.

Agroecology has long been championed by millions of small-scale producers, peasants, and family farmers who grow the vast majority of the world's food. Backed by researchers and policy makers, agroecology offers a critical social, environmental, and political process for rural communities and farmers to be leaders in transitioning agriculture to work with nature, support fair and decent rural livelihoods, and ensure the right to healthy food and nutrition for all.

Since 2014, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has held ongoing consultations with farmers across the world to ensure that the emergence of agroecology as a policy framework is accountable to rural communities, and the resounding message from this process has been clear: rural communities - as well as urban communities - need agroecology in this time of crisis. This is why the CFS began the current process to discuss and implement agroecology, putting agroecology at the center of debates at the United Nations in Rome about how to end hunger in the face of climate crisis.

The CFS is the most important, inclusive, and democratic multilateral space for developing global policies to end hunger and poverty and to protect and ensure the human rights of rural and urban communities around the world. After the global food price crisis of 2007-2008, the UN made substantial reforms to improve the CFS, making it the first space in the UN system to allow civil society organizations - non-profits and social movements - to debate equally with governments, giving rural peoples a critical voice in the global policy-making process.

Most recently, the CFS released a report conducted by independent experts stating that agroecology would help farmers and ensure food security in the face of climate change, as it helps not only with adaptation but simultaneously with mitigation as well. The report also made clear that more must be done to support agroecology. The CFS will be discussing the report at its 46th annual meeting this week, and it is planning to spend the following year discussing policies that governments can take to support and implement agroecology.

We want to express our full support for the CFS and the convergence process towards endorsing and implementing agroecology. However, we know that the US government often blocks pro-family farmer and pro-rural community policy discussion at the UN. Rather than representing America's family farmer and rural worker interests in a public forum, the US government has too often attempted to keep the status quo in American agriculture that currently only benefits corporate interests. We will not accept these actions from our government moving forward.

Additionally, we, as civil society organizations in the US, demand to be consulted on positions taken by the US government at the CFS. Over the past several years, the US government has repeatedly limited the inclusion of our organizations in CFS regional consultations. This failure to engage farmers, food chain workers, and other constituencies fails to respect the spirit of the CFS and its commitment to engage those most affected in decision-making processes.

We understand that there will be CFS regional consultations on Food Security and Nutrition with North American stakeholders in November of this year, and we look forward to participating in that space to raise the voices of family farmers and fishermen, workers, and rural communities.

Ultimately, we believe that a transition to agroecology is necessary to ensure an environmentally sustainable and prosperous future. We urge the US government to support this process within the CFS.

Sincerely,

A Growing Culture
ActionAid USA
Agricultural Justice Project
Agroecology Research Action Collective
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
Boricua Organization of Ecologic Agriculture (Puerto Rico)
Climate Justice Alliance
Community Alliance for Global Justice
Community Farm Alliance
Cooperative Development Institute, Inc
Cumberland Countians for EcoJustice
Dakota Rural Action
Family Farm Defenders
Family. Agriculture. Resource. Management. Services. (F.A.R.M.S.)
Farm Forward
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
Farm Women United
Farmworker Association of Florida
Food Systems New England
Food and Water Watch
Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives
Green Roots
Health Care Without Harm
Indigenous Environmental Network
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Iskashitaa Refugee Network
Logan Square Farmers Market
Michigan Food and Farming Systems
National Family Farm Coalition
Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility of United Church of Christ
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Massachusetts
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New York
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Vermont
Northern Plains Resource Council
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance
Oakland Institute
Pesticide Action Network North America
Progressive Agriculture Organization
Real Food Generation
Rural Coalition
Rural Vermont
SouthEast Michigan Producers Association
The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Program in Nutrition, Columbia University
University of New Hampshire Sustainability Institute
Urban Seeds
US Food Sovereignty Alliance
US Friends of the MST
WhyHunger