

The US Food Sovereignty Alliance

The US Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA) is a national alliance of organizations representing family farmers, fishermen/women, farmworkers and other food chain workers; food justice activists; Indigenous Peoples; and anti-hunger, faith-based and environmental justice advocates. The Alliance seeks to end poverty, rebuild local food economies, and assert democratic control over the food system by addressing the economic policies that encourage corporate control of the food system and fail small-to-medium scale food providers, food chain workers, and consumers. We uphold the right to food as a basic human right and strive to connect our struggles to the international movement for food sovereignty.

Origins & Current Priorities

The USFSA, formerly known as the US Working Group on the Food Crisis, was founded in 2008 to provide a unified response to the food crisis from progressive anti-hunger, food, farm, labor, faith, and trade justice movements. The group issued a 'Call to Action' to end the crisis, which urged the following solutions: 1) stabilize prices for farmers and consumers globally; 2) re-balance power in the food system toward people rather than corporations; 3) make agriculture environmentally sustainable; and 4) guarantee the right to healthy food by building local and regional food systems.

At the 2010 US Social Forum, members of the Food Crisis Working Group held a People's Movement Assembly on Food Sovereignty with more than 150 participants from diverse US and international movements. The culmination of this process was consensus to transform the Food Crisis Working Group into the US Food Sovereignty Alliance to build deeper connections between local, national and international food activists.

Following an extensive consultation process involving representatives of constituencies most impacted by the food crisis, the USFSA was officially launched on World Food Day, October 16, 2010. In its first year of operation, the Alliance led a series of conference calls with sixty urban farming, fishing, farmworker and farmer leaders to align their agendas as a US food sovereignty platform then hosted a national week of action for food sovereignty and food justice around World Food Day, from October 10-17, 2011. The USFSA was also represented at the 2011 Nyeleni European Food Sovereignty Forum.

In November 2011, the Alliance hosted its first Annual Membership Assembly. This was attended by 75 family fishermen and farmers, urban gardeners, food justice activists, food and farm workers, and other allies from the United States, Brazil, Mexico and Canada. Discussions identified challenges and obstacles to achieving food sovereignty, opportunities for change, and priorities for the Alliance for the upcoming year.

Three thematic work teams emerged from the Assembly: Land and Resource Grabs and Land Reform; Immigrant Rights and Trade; and the Rights of Mother Earth/Defense of the Commons. These work teams have held regular frequent calls and re-convened at the second membership assembly, held March 2013, in Tampa, Florida. The Alliance chose this date to enable broader participation in the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' March for Fair Food and the Florida Farmworkers Association's 30th Anniversary Event in Apopka.

The members affirmed continuation of the three working groups, learned from each other's experiences, and created more detailed work plans for each issue area.

Thematic Work Team Plans

The Land and Resource Grabs team identified the lack of information and context among grassroots organizations on global land grabs and the effects they can have on communities. As such, it is planning a Day of Action to educate grassroots organizations on the relationship between access to land and community power, to share resources on successful land protection strategies, and to organize a strong base of people working for food sovereignty by protecting land. The Day of Action will likely highlight local campaigns to protect land in Detroit where the Community Land Trust strives to convert vacant lots into small farms and gardens; in New England where fishermen/women are fighting to maintain regulations for small boats; and in rural Wisconsin and Maine where farmland is bought by large investors, raising its price out of reach of and squeezing family farmers. The Day of Action will be supported by educational and organizing conference calls to develop a shared understanding of viable strategies and messages, as well as the research and distribution of documents on issues related to land use - speculation, privatization, land theft and energy extraction - and the development of new popular education tools. The Day of Action will likely take place in late 2014 or early 2015, based on group decision.

The Immigrant Rights and Trade Team will conduct a communications audit that identifies existing resources, tools, images, curricula, et al that highlight the challenges immigrants face when working in the food system, including unregulated trade, foreign and agricultural policies and corporate interests. They will utilize the results of the communications audit to identify issue areas and/or communication tools that are lacking and/or under-resourced. The team will conduct research to develop a new resource featuring new content and design. It will disseminate the new resource, along with existing resources identified through its audit, to the wider membership of the USFSA and its allies with a particular emphasis on youth and others in frontline communities.

The Defending the Rights of Mother Earth/Defense of the Commons team conducted and assessed a survey of USFSA members to identify existing initiatives around seed sovereignty and seed saving. Recognizing that seeds are a critical link to preserving the health and wealth of the nation's communities and the biodiversity of the planet, the resulting report is available at the USFSA [website](#).

Plans are underway to develop a Seed Keepers Collective, which aims to provide training, resources and support to growers across the country on collecting, storing, planting, and sharing native seeds (as well as the cultures and stories accompanying them). Ensuring access to seeds and providing proper stewardship of this resource are fundamental to the sustainability of healthy food production and toxin-free soil and water. In addition, the working group also plans to pilot one to two regional exchanges to share practices and strategies for promoting agroecology and collecting popular education resources on various themes relating to Mother Earth Rights, including seed sovereignty, agroecology, and extreme energy extraction.

Food Sovereignty Prize

In 2013, the USFSA sponsored and hosted the 2013 Food Sovereignty Prize, which honors grassroots activists promoting food sovereignty as a direct counter to the corporate controlled World Food Prize awarded annually in Des Moines, Iowa around World Food Day. Details of the 2013 recipients and events may be found at foodsovereigntyprize.org.

The 2013 Food Sovereignty Prize was an important space for educating and organizing in the US around the corporate control of our food system, the poisoning of our food and environment by agrochemicals, and the threats to food production through climate change.

The prize also allowed us to discuss real solutions to these problems through food sovereignty and agroecology. Furthermore, the exchange and “cross-pollination” between grassroots organizations proved valuable to the 2013 FSP honorees, USFSA members and local allies. In the view of Rosnel Jean-Baptiste (TetKole/Kat Je, Haiti), one of the 2013 FSP winners, it was reassuring “*to know that in the US exists an organization that shares our values.*” Ava (Detroit Black Food Security Network) said that she appreciated visits with Kat Je and Dessalines Brigade and that “*...we certainly will continue this conversation.*”

The communication strategy around the 2013 FSP as an alternative to the World Food Prize also helped USFSA’s name recognition. Press releases, articles and blogs were posted at Common Dreams and the Huffington Post, in addition to USFSA member and ally (including Via Campesina International) websites. Another media success was the contribution of Alliance members and allies who tweeted on the event day. WhyHunger created an article of sample tweets (see <http://storify.com/WhyHunger/food-sovereignty-prize-2013>).

Plans for the 2014 Food Sovereignty Prize are underway now, with options being discussed to hold an event in Des Moines, Iowa - site of the World Food Prize events - as well as tours or exchanges to strengthen local organizing on key issues.

More information on the USFSA may be found at <http://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org> or by contacting any of the participating organizations.