

Report from the USFSA's IV National Assembly (2018)

The US Food Sovereignty Alliance held its IV National Assembly from October 12th thru 14th in Bellingham, Washington with the participation of 117 members, allies, and individuals from over 71 organizations and 7 countries.

The IV National Assembly was the culmination of a process to complete a two year Alliance work plan. The process started with an assembly in each region of the Alliance – the South, Northeast, Midwest, and West. At each regional assembly, members analyzed the current conditions, both challenges and opportunities, to advance food sovereignty and the right to food at the regional and national levels. Issues emerging from the regional assemblies were presented at the National Assembly for discussion and consideration for inclusion in the USFSA's national work plan.

WORK PLAN OVERVIEW

At the Assembly, members of the Alliance set a two-year work plan toward our vision of food sovereignty. The IV National Assembly was the first Assembly as a regionally-led alliance. Though work is carried out at the regional level, five cross-alliance collectives emerged to organize priorities at the national level. These collectives include: Political Education; Narrative Strategy; International Relationships; Youth; and Agroecology: Land and Water. Members and allies are welcome to participate in USFSA's collectives. We reaffirmed our commitment to having the USFSA be a process with multiple pathways for involvement regionally and nationally. Building our grassroots-driven movement continues to be led at the regional level.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY PRIZE

The Assembly concluded on Sunday evening with the 10th annual Food Sovereignty Prize (FSP) Award Ceremony (watch and share the full video [here](#)).

[Black Mesa Water Coalition](#) (BMWC) was honored with the domestic prize. They shared information about BMWC's programmatic work based on their commitments to restore indigenous food sovereignty and uplift youth leaders among Navajo and Hopi Communities. Roberto Nutlouis and Sheldon Natoni received the award on behalf of the Coalition.

[Organización Boricúa de Agricultura Ecológica de Puerto Rico](#) was honored with the international award. Dalma Colon and Jesus Vazquez received the award on behalf of the Organization. They spoke about their collective focal points, specifically the mobilization of Food Sovereignty Brigades to assist farmers with recovery efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

After receiving the awards, a short video made during the Assembly was shown, highlighting people's stories about what brings them into this work. Next, audience members watched videos from BMWC and *Organización Boricúa*. The celebration continued with an arts and culture event.

The FSP is the USFSA's response to the Iowa-based World Food Prize (WFP), an annual award of \$250,000 that recognizes the work of individuals in the neoliberal-capitalist industrialization of agri-food systems. The WFP is sponsored by Big Ag industry groups including Bayer, Syngenta, and Dow Chemical. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funds part of the WFP. The 2018 WFP was awarded to two advocates from a couple of the largest multinational initiatives on maternal and child nutrition.

The USFSA argues that the 2018 WFP recipients do not take into account the Right to Food of small-scale producers. The WFP winners co-opt the work of farmers, farmworkers, and food producers. The USFSA has been awarding the Food Sovereignty Prize for ten years to grassroots organizations championing solutions coming from those most impacted by the injustices of the global food system. The FSP affirms that nothing short of the true democratization of our food system will enable us to end hunger once and for all. (You can read more about the 2018 FSP honorees and their work toward Food Sovereignty and Energy Democracy through a Just Transition in this series of blogs parts [1](#),[2](#),[3](#).)

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY

The USFSA stands in solidarity with [La Vía Campesina](#) as they seek to achieve adoption of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas](#). Peasants as well as smallholder and medium-scale farming families are increasingly at risk and often victims of displacement, criminalization, violence, and harassment. Existing legal instruments are not enough to protect peasants and rural workers from ongoing systematic discrimination and abuses, with rural women particularly affected. The goal of the Declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas is to create an international human rights instrument, improving the promotion and protection of their rights and drawing attention to the threats and discrimination suffered by peasants and people involved in agri-food production across the world. We call on the United States and other Member States to support the Declaration on Peasant Rights. Our struggle for Food Sovereignty depends on the protection of the rights of peasants and smallholder and medium-scale family farmers.

We stand in solidarity with farmworkers, whose lives are at risk due to the working conditions and violations in the fields, and whose incomes remain the lowest of any sector in our economy, despite the important role of farmworkers in feeding us. The current H2A-Agricultural visa program is a temporary guest worker visa program; and employers anticipating a shortage of domestic workers can use the program for agricultural labor. However, the H2A guest worker program has served as a way to dehumanize the worker by turning them into a "legal" mobile work force with no chance for ultimate legalization or residence in the US, or for

a permanent form of livelihood. Being tied by the H2A rules to a single employer, the grower, H2A workers who have not organized themselves into a union are subject to abuses and economic extortion by labor contractors and foremen and by wage theft by their employer. The guest worker system views farmworkers as resources and not human beings. The USFSA opposes the H2A program as it stands and denounces in the strongest terms the proposed H2C program that would greatly worsen H2A worker conditions and continue to displace current domestic workers, expand guest worker provisions into the food processing, nursery and other food system industries, eliminate housing support for the workers, and continue the exploitation of workers through systems that have derived from plantation slavery.

We also stand in solidarity with the [Call to Protect Food Systems from Genetic Extinction Technology](#). The USFSA says NO to Release of gene drives in our agri-food systems. Gene drives are a new tool that force genetically engineered traits through entire populations of insects, plants, animals and other organisms. If released, they could spread engineered genes uncontrollably, altering ecological systems and foodways. Use of gene drives would likely undermine the food sovereignty of indigenous communities, farmers, food workers and consumers, including the right of all peoples to healthy, ecologically-produced and culturally appropriate food. The USFSA calls for a global moratorium on any release of engineered gene drives, and we urge governments to establish participatory technology assessment processes to ensure the full, free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and other affected populations for all emerging biotechnologies, including gene drives.

We stand in solidarity with producers, eaters, and Mother Earth, who all would be victimized by cruel and unjust proposals in the House version of the Farm Bill, such as those that would increase work requirements for SNAP eligibility, end the Double Up Bucks farmers market program, defund critical conservation programs, and reduce support for beginning and socially challenged farmer programs.

Lastly, we denounce the blatant attempt in the Farm Bill, through the King amendment, to give corporations and agribusiness greater control over the food system, and to preempt local and democratic control of the food and farm system. This amendment would restrict state and local governments from regulating agricultural products and could nullify the [Food Sovereignty Act](#) in Maine. Broadly interpreted by the courts, it would preempt laws that curb pesticide use, regulate farmworker safety, prevent cruel livestock practices, and label GMO foods, and it would prevent "Buy Local" initiatives and state efforts to legalize raw milk and defend the integrity of wild rice. For example, state laws that restrict the application of dicamba, a weed killer known to vaporize and drift for several miles, could not be enforced, thereby putting grains, trees, vegetables, and other crops not genetically engineered to resist dicamba at great risk.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

At the IV National Assembly, we reaffirmed our commitment to food sovereignty and dedication to ensuring:

- Access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and desired food in all communities;
- Decision-making authority over agri-food systems for food producers, processors, distributors, and eaters;
- Equitable Access to land and fisheries for those who feed humanity; and
- Social, cultural, and economic support for access to the common goods needed by food producers, processors, and distributors.

In particular, we stand for:

- The prohibition of the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) of living things including seeds, plant material, animals, fish, bacteria, etc.;
- An end to so- called “ free” trade regimes emanating from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and regional agreements such as NAFTA, CAFTA, etc.,- DR etc. as well as bilateral agreements between the US and individual countries;
- An expansion and recovery of the commons for all to access and control equitably including biodiversity, land, fisheries, seeds, water, and other forms of cultural expression and transmission of knowledge;
- A defense of land, water and diversity from corporate exploitation, including pollution, development, and other extractive activity;
- A democratization of agricultural, economic and civil laws and judicial frameworks for the expansion of self- determination of peoples, nations and communities;
- A respect for and decolonization of the land, water, and cultural rights of First Nations / Indigenous peoples on all continents and in particular of North America/ Turtle Island;.
- The end of violence against women, LGBTQ, and gender nonconforming persons in the food system and in general;
- Promotion and expansion of the practices of agroecology encompassing both traditional practices as well as cultural innovations by people working the land and the sea, as well as and their scientific and academic allies; and
- The full rights of workers to organize and unionize without retaliation in all sectors of the food system, from farmworkers, to food chain workers, to farmers and fishers.

OUR NEXT STEPS

Through our commitment to develop a shared analysis among the various sectors represented in the gathering, the IV National Assembly highlighted the importance of access to and control of resources by local communities to achieve food sovereignty. Through the grassroots leadership of each region and the creation of our national collectives – Political Education; Narrative Strategy; International Relationships; Youth; and Agroecology: Land and Water – our two-year work plan will continue to build our movements for food sovereignty locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Indigenous people's self-determination over their territories are under attack due to corporations' greed for land, water and energy. National and global policies continue to favor corporate agribusiness consolidation over the survival and viability of small-scale sustainable agriculture. For instance, the US Farm Bill continues to drive family farmers into bankruptcy through rigged commodity markets that do not provide a parity price to actual producers, while also allowing speculators such as the global pension fund TIAA to engage in land grabbing. In response to this disturbing trend, one strong proposal coming out of the assembly is to explore establishment of a USFSA community land trust that would facilitate the transfer of land to beginning farmers and other marginalized communities that have been historically denied access and enable a just transition towards food sovereignty.

REFLECTIONS / FEEDBACK

Participants of the Assembly process reflected on their experiences by expressing gratitude for: the work of our local hosts, Community to Community Development, as well as the USFSA coordination and IV Assembly logistics teams; spaces to learn and build relationships; intergenerational connections; the collective energy and strength of our social movements; international solidarity; the gifts and teachings of Mother Earth; indigenous peoples' resistance to colonialism; and the spirits of fallen defenders of the common sources of life and good living.

For the global struggle for food sovereignty we say ¡VIVA!