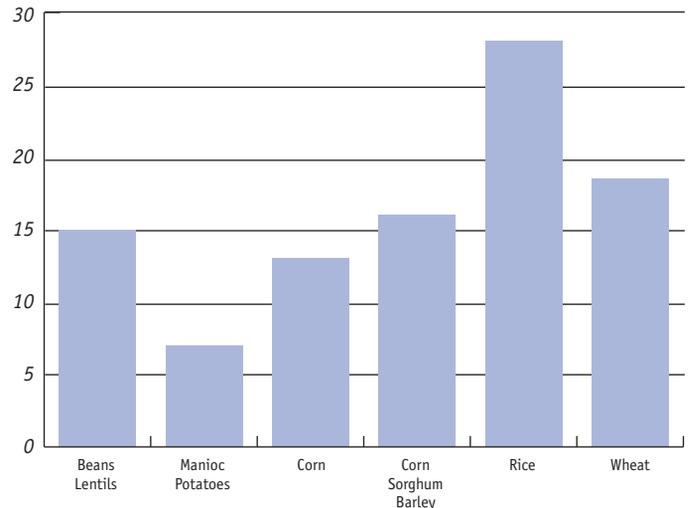


impoverished people, primarily in developing countries, simply do not have the means to procure it. According to the World Bank, between February and April 2008, the price of rice, the staple food for 3 billion people, rose by 75%. At the same time, half of humanity lives on \$2 or less a day and three quarters of the world's population spend 75% of their income on food². By comparison, the typical Québec shopping cart represents 12% of family income.

While developed countries were less seriously affected, this increase in costs was not without an impact. Between 2005 and 2008 in

Domestic prices of food products remains higher than before the crisis: price increases over two years to the end of 2008

Variation as a percentage



N.B.: Data refer to the mean price increase as a percentage in prices corrected for inflation, December 2008 compared with December 2006.

Source : FAO.

Montréal, the price of basic foodstuffs rose by 14%. That, in turn, caused an inevitable rise in the prices for processed foods. The cost of a basic basket of food for a family of four has reached approximately \$180 a week, representing roughly 40% of the financial capacity of a low-income family³. Directors of food banks have watched their clientele grow significantly, at the same time that they have to deal with the same increases in costs. In 2008, when the global crisis had subsided and prices stabilised, they remained nevertheless 17% higher than they had been in 2006.

The Challenge of Feeding the World
Food crisis

At the beginning of 2008, violence broke out simultaneously in various places around the world. On February 20 and 28, 400 people were arrested and many others injured in violent demonstrations in Burkina Faso. In the same period, forty people were killed and 1,600 arrested in similar circumstances in Cameroon. On March 30, in Dakar, Senegal, twenty-four people were arrested during a demonstration. At the beginning of April, riots broke out in numerous Haitian cities, killing five and injuring 200. In Mahala in Egypt, confrontations with police left one dead, hundreds injured and 340 arrested. A total of thirty-seven countries were affected by these demonstrations¹. What was going on? Was there a coordinated movement organised by some obscure influences, or was this a spontaneous movement in response to a common problem? Or simply a coincidence? What did these people want? Simply put, the right to eat!

This incident from the world's recent history is known as the "global food crisis." In only a few months the advances of the last ten years in reducing global poverty, generally a structural problem, will have been wiped out, driving 100 million more people into dire poverty, according to the World Bank and the United Nations. This crisis is in no way similar to any the world has ever seen. The Earth produces enough food to satisfy the needs of its inhabitants. The problem is that more and more



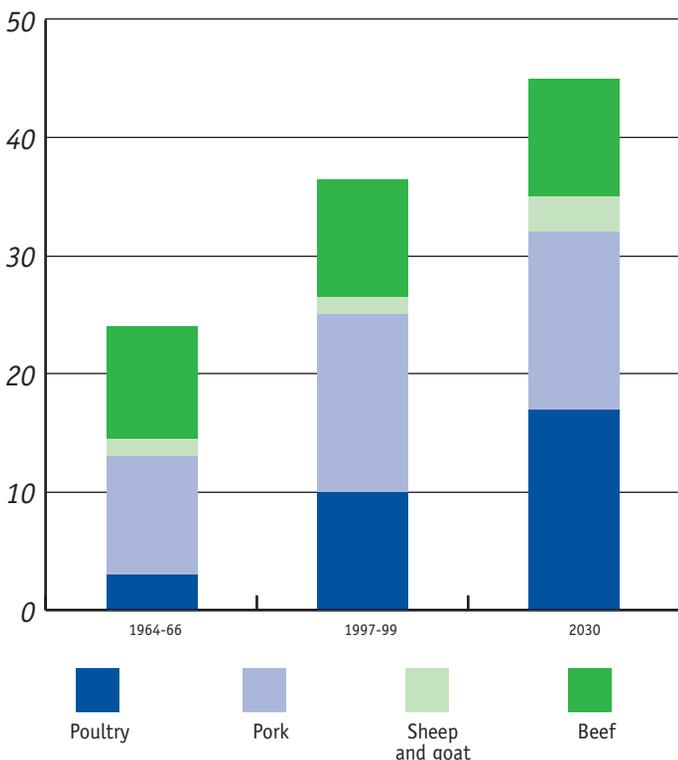
The reasons for the crisis



There are a number of phenomena, both human and natural, that help to explain this sad episode. On the one hand, emerging nations such as China, India and Brazil are experiencing exceptional economic development. The food needs of their increasingly prosperous populations are increasing. They eat more meat, which puts pressure on the demand for the grains that feed livestock. Competition between livestock and humans becomes fiercer. Eighty per cent of food from animal sources depends on crops which are also eaten by humans. Meat production has increased by a factor of five since the 1950s and is expected to double again in the next twenty years.

Average per capita consumption worldwide of meat, 1964-66 – 2030

Consumption (kg/person/yr)



Livestock production increases to satisfy the growing demand for meat.

Source : FAO.

At the same time, serious droughts in the past few years in various parts of the world, notably Australia and Ukraine (both “breadbaskets”), floods in Bangladesh, and exceptionally heavy rains in Europe have undermined harvests and reduced the food supply. Almost 2 million hectares of the planet’s surface—an area twice the size of China—are already degraded, in some cases irreversibly. One person in three is affected in one way or

another, by the degradation of soils⁴. Intensive agricultural practices imposed by trade liberalisation have contributed significantly to this degradation. We can look forward to further losses as climate change continues.

World demand for grains is, in turn, being “doped” by the production of bio-fuels from grains such as corn. Almost 20% of grain production in the U.S. is currently used to feed...ethanol plants. The development of the ethanol market, encouraged by the governments of the U.S. and Brazil, but also by Canada and a number of European countries, has encouraged farmers to abandon certain crops in favour of corn and to cut down forests for agricultural land. In the last six months of 2007, 300,000 hectares of Brazilian forest were clear-cut, an area the size of 278,000 soccer fields⁵. Ethanol production is expected to double by 2015⁶.

And, finally, the most depressing cause: speculation in agricultural land and goods. Burnt by the economic crisis, financial speculators have elected to place their bets on an investment for which demand is growing and will continue to grow, an investment that is safer and potentially more profitable than stocks and bonds. Foodstuffs (corn, wheat, rice, etc.) negotiated on commodities markets are an attractive investment. Investors purchase rights (contracts) at a fixed price to given quantities of grains until the sale price on the market (along with expected profits) provides a substantial boost to their portfolios. Almost 40 million hectares are said to have been sold to big business in 2009 worldwide⁷. In this way, the spiral of speculation revolves around the prices of goods and land to the profit of investors but to the detriment of all those who took to the streets at the beginning of 2008.



Photo: James Steidl

Even more deep-seated causes



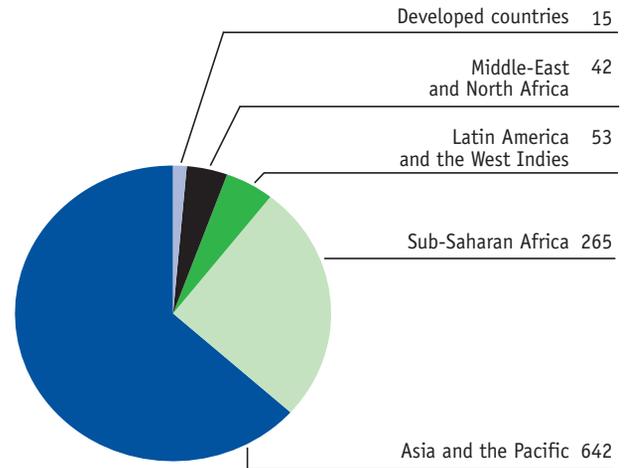
The number of those suffering from hunger throughout the world has been increasing for a decade, and has now reached more than a billion people, i.e., a sixth of the world's population. Of those people, 98.5% are found in emerging and developing countries (see illustration). In the developed countries, 15 million people are hungry⁸. Despite attempts on the part of the international community, there has been no progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which consist of reducing by half between 1990 and 2015 the number of those suffering from hunger. This goal, which some consider unrealistic, will prove to be so if nothing is done, if nations

and the international community do not take concrete steps to alter the course of events through fundamental structural change.

When World Food Day was launched in October 2008, Bill Clinton, the former American president, called on the international community to "stop using the global financial crisis as an "excuse" for dodging the growing problem of hunger⁹." In the fall of 2009, Jacques Diouf, the director-general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), chided the international community that had, in only a few weeks, freed up several hundred billion dollars to save the banks and the

The number of people suffering from hunger is greater than ever: malnutrition in 2009, by region (millions)

Total = 1.02 billion



Source : FAO

economy, while only 44 billion was needed to eradicate famine and poverty in the world¹⁰. The problem is far more profound than that. It is primarily a question of the way the world is partitioned, arising from four centuries of colonisation, and the concentration of the means of production, which has fuelled more than a century of industrialisation.

Land distribution

European expansion and its model for exploiting conquered territories (colonisation) divided the world in two: the motherlands (today's rich nations) and their colonies (now the developing nations) which provided the resources they lacked. In agriculture, colonisation followed the same pattern everywhere in the world. Principally beginning in the 18th Century, when the demand for food increased in Europe, colonial enterprises evicted the local populations and took over the finest agricultural lands¹¹. They exploited those conquered lands massively to grow crops for export. By its very nature, this development model limits the culture of market crops that feed local populations, relegating these to more remote and less fertile land. Ever since, more and more land has been dedicated to raising crops for export, relying almost exclusively on foreign capital. Local populations provided the labour at cut rates, if not for free. It was in this way that a minority of Europeans gradually acquired most of their colonial territories¹².

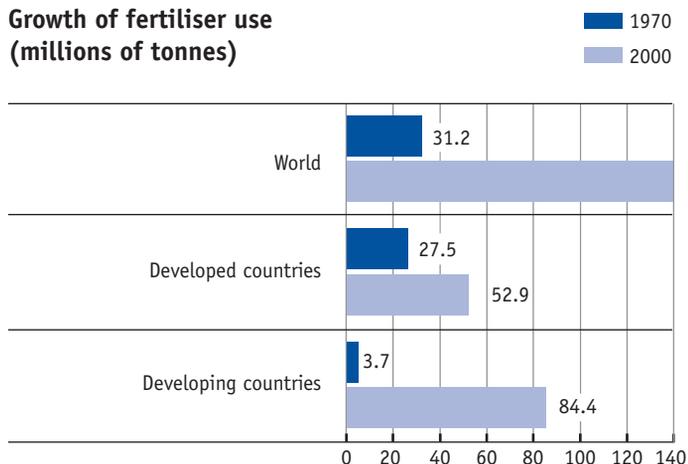
Concentration of wealth

In the mid-19th Century, the world was already joined in an economic system inherited from European expansion. Numerous commercial routes united the four corners of the globe, allowing Europe, and then the United States, to amass sufficient resources and capital to propel the Industrial Revolution. This coincided with an unprecedented increase in global population. The planet was put to work to satisfy the ever-growing needs of the population. New technologies of transportation, refrigeration and freezing enabled increased importation of perishable food-stuffs from the South. Simultaneously, mechanisation was revolutionising existing agricultural practices, furthering the emergence of a method of cultivation that was much more profitable in the short term: monoculture. More than ever, the countries of the South became providers of cheap natural and agricultural resources to furnish Northern countries, which processed them in their new industries. The transformation of raw materials is ten times more profitable than their extraction. Those profits contributed to the institution of industrial might concentrated almost exclusively in the developed countries and, with it, the ballooning wealth of their citizens. Despite political independence (India in 1947, Southeast Asian countries in the 1950s, and African nations around the 1960s), developing nations have not been able, in the absence of a sufficiently developed industrial base, to transform their own resources nor to shake off their economic dependence, thus perpetuating the North-South division.

The problem that arose then was a consequence of policies applied in developing countries following the Second World War. While those policies may have been profitable for some countries in the short term, they have been considered only a partial success, as a result of their social and environmental impacts. Let's remember that in the 1950s, out of a population of 2.5 billion inhabitants, two out of three people (1.5 billion) suffered from malnutrition¹³. Sixty years later, fewer people are suffering from hunger and everyone consumes on average 25% more calories than before, despite the meteoric increase in the global population. To continue feeding the world, it was essential to increase agricultural production, which began the "green revolution."

The term "green revolution" refers to the spectacular increase in global agricultural production that resulted from scientific progress in agronomy. It also refers to policies that, at the time, governed agricultural development, primarily in developing countries. This revolution was supported by the development of new high-yield varieties (wheat, rice...), selective breeding of more productive varieties, the use of mineral fertilisers and pesticides, the mechanisation of agricultural operations that made monoculture possible over vast areas, and, finally, large-scale irrigation of the soil.

Growth of fertiliser use (millions of tonnes)



Source: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

These innovations required considerable investment. The farmers who did best out of the change were those who already owned large tracts of land and had access to credit, along with those whose activities received substantial government support. A large proportion of the peasant population, unable to keep up with the change, was forced to give up the practice of agriculture, abandon their lands and join the ranks of the have-nots. The "green revolution" was thus instrumental in the disappearance of market farming, which allowed farm families to feed themselves and local populations, and the expansion of large-scale agriculture, focusing on export, high-volume supply at reduced prices, and the production of grains for animal feed. The regions of the world that benefited from this revolution increased their yields, reduced their production costs and

exported their surpluses to the domestic and international markets. Unable to produce at comparable prices, and often deeply in debt¹⁴, local farmers were generally cut out of the competition. The "green revolution" was thus often responsible for aggravating social, economic and regional disparities as it accelerated rural exodus and the specialisation of agricultural lands.

In terms of the environment, these innovations contributed to the degradation, the salinisation and the loss of fertility of soils, the pollution of water, a significant drop in water tables as a result of intensive irrigation, a reduction in energy sources, as well as a dramatic erosion of biodiversity. In the end, the "green revolution" set the table for the creation of an even more globalised food system requiring ever increasing transportation of food.

A new variety of colonialism?

A worrisome tendency has become apparent since the global food crisis of 2008: the large-scale purchase or leasing of agricultural lands in developing countries. The FAO has noted that at least 2.5 million hectares of land, a territory the size of Belgium, have been bought up in Africa in recent years. The purchasers are primarily foreign nations poor in arable land who want a stable source of food to feed their populations. But others are multinationals looking to corner the market, businesses seeking land to produce bio-fuels, and pension funds looking to turn a profit. While there are some who believe that developing nations benefit from these transactions, many others consider it to be "a form of neo-colonialism with disastrous consequences for the countries involved."

Source: www.alternatives.ca/fra/journal-alternatives/publications/dossiers/imperialisme-ecologique/article/la-nouvelle-ruée-sur-les-terres



Photo Unesco / Roger, Dominique

From structural adjustment programs to development policies of the World Trade Organisation



At the beginning of the 1980s, developing nations were sideswiped by a new calamity. In the 1970s, the giant international banks had supported third-world development with massive lending at favourable rates. In 1979, to support an economy in crisis and to attract foreign capital, the U.S. government dramatically increased interest rates. From 4% or 5% they rose suddenly to 16% and even 18%, thus tripling the already substantial debt of developing countries. A number of countries found themselves unable to respect their obligations. To remedy this crisis, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank agreed to extend repayment of

the outstanding debt of these countries or to offer them new loans conditional on their adopting extremely rigid economic restraint policies known as structural adjustment programs (SAP). These policies demand, first, a draconian reduction in public spending (privatisation, cuts to public services in education, health and social assistance) and, second, the integration of the national economy into the global economy. The latter takes the form of opening up domestic markets to products from developed countries and the reorientation of the economy toward the exportation of natural resources in order to replenish the treasuries of the developing country¹⁵.

Agricultural aid has been reduced

Share of PDA for agriculture (percentage)



Note : PDA = public development aid

Source : OCDE.

The impact of the SAPs was, in many cases, a disaster, particularly for agriculture. To satisfy the requirements of these programs, countries were required to specialise in export crops (cotton, cacao, wheat, corn, etc.) at the expense of market agriculture, to eliminate aid to small farmers, and to open their borders to agricultural products produced at less cost in other countries. This was accompanied by a continual reduction in foreign aid for agriculture to developing countries. By forcing peasants to compete directly with Northern farms that benefited from advanced

production methods and market access, the SAPs had the effect of devastating family farming in poor countries. They also wiped out local production that was unable to compete with the avalanche of imported goods flooding their domestic markets. Kenya, a country which, prior to 1980, produced a surplus in grains, was struck by famine in the 1990s. Closer to home, a number of Mexican farmers were wiped out by the dumping of subsidised U.S. corn under the first free-trade agreement to specifically target agriculture in 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)¹⁶. Today, 80% of the world's poor live in rural areas.

Faced with ever more criticism, the IMF and the World Bank abandoned the SAPs at the end of the 1990s and turned over the reins for development to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), founded in 1994. The WTO is charged with establishing worldwide rules for free-trade in all the goods and services on earth, particularly in the agricultural field. Through the Agreement on Agriculture, the WTO limits the right of governments to support and protect their agriculture¹⁷ by enforcing free access to foreign agricultural products, the progressive reduction of local agricultural support programs, and the progressive elimination of dumping and export subsidies. If this agreement has been profitable for countries such as Brazil and Thailand, it has left poorer nations thoroughly confused. While Southern nations are forced to apply the provisions of the Agreement on Agriculture, the developed countries are subsidising their own farmers to the tune of \$360 billion annually at the same time they pursue aggressive policies of dumping their agricultural products in nations of the South. Unable to compete in those conditions, developing countries pay a serious price. Having already given up their market agriculture, they now find themselves unable to profitably sell their export production on either the domestic or foreign markets. Increasingly dependent on foreign aid and the importation of foodstuffs, these nations lose a vital aspect of their sovereignty: the ability to define their agricultural policy and to choose the best means to feed their own populations¹⁸.

The agricultural world, in both the North and the South, is not sitting idle in the face of this situation. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for development as well as a growing number of Northern agricultural organisations are mounting an increasingly strong opposition to the model of agricultural development imposed by the WTO. Under a variety of banners, third-world countries made their voices heard at the WTO conferences in Doha in 2001, in Cancun in 2003, in Hong Kong in 2005 and in Geneva in 2008 to oppose the liberalisation of trade in agricultural products demanded by the WTO and the Agreement on Agriculture. The conflict opposes two increasingly irreconcilable visions: a mercantilist concept of trade in agricultural products versus the right of populations to feed themselves. In light of the food crisis referred to earlier, it is becoming more and more evident that the free market is not conducive to responding to people's needs, but, rather, to paying the highest dividends to shareholders of powerful companies and multinational agribusinesses. The deregulated market is antithetical to

Toward food sovereignty



That point of view is increasingly shared by people worldwide. Bill Clinton stated in 2008 that “food is not a raw material like any other.” While there will always be a global market for crops such as rice, wheat or corn, “it would be insane to treat food like a colour television set and imagine it is possible to develop these countries...without reinforcing their ability to feed themselves with their own hands.” He goes on, “We have to return to a policy of maximum agricultural self-sufficiency.”²⁰

The policy Mr Clinton refers to is similar to the concept of food sovereignty being promoted by more and more organisations worldwide. This idea has been gaining

ground since 1996, when on the fringe of the FAO’s World Food Summit in Rome, representatives of civil society, under the aegis of the Via Campesina international movement²¹, signed the *Declaration on Food Sovereignty*. This initiative bore fruit in a series of engagements: the *Platform for Food Sovereignty* (Brussels, 1998), the *Bangalore Declaration* (India, 2000), the *Declaration of People’s Food Sovereignty* (Rome, 2001), the *Nyéleni Declaration for Food Sovereignty* (Mali, 2007), and, more recently, the declaration *D’abord nourrir notre monde*, signed in Montréal in September 2007 by Québec and other Canadian organisations concerned with the future of agriculture and food²².

What is food sovereignty?

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agricultural policies: to protect and regulate national agricultural production and exchange in order to achieve the objectives of sustainable development; to determine their level of food self-sufficiency and eliminate dumping on their markets. Food sovereignty is not opposed to trade insofar as it is subordinated to the right of peoples to local agricultural and food production that is healthful and respects the environment, that is fair and respects the right of all the partners to decent pay and working conditions.

Excerpt from *D’abord nourrir notre monde*.

The declaration can be signed at the following address:
www.nourrirnotremonde.org/declaration

Food sovereignty is an approach that responds to the fundamental challenge of feeding the world. It is being embraced by more and more people and organisations, not just in nations of the South suffering the worst effects of food crisis, but also in developing countries that are now more and more coming to the realisation that agriculture and food, in both North and South, demand an approach other than that proposed by the WTO. The members of the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec (UPA), at their general meeting of 2007, voted unanimously “to make food sovereignty the spearhead of a new social contract to be proposed to fellow citizens and governments.... As the



Photo: René D’Anjou

the only measure capable of solving the problem of hunger and malnutrition in the world. Nothing other than an international policy to control and regulate food supply, both production and distribution, can ensure the protection and the promotion of market agriculture, the return of the family farm and the development of domestic markets whose principal function is to feed local populations. As the UNESCO report on the state of global agriculture notes,¹⁹ “the status quo is not an option. Agricultural systems will have to change radically ... if the international community is to prevent population increase and climate change from degenerating into social chaos and environmental disaster.”

Québec is cut out of supermarket shelves

Agricultural producers and the small food processors of Québec have ever greater difficulty in finding placement for their products on supermarket shelves. As a result of free-trade, they find themselves competing with large producers, some in Québec, but more and more from outside the province. These industries are able to supply Québec’s three food distribution giants more cheaply. With the exception of Australia, nowhere on earth do we find a similar concentration in food distribution. Small suppliers have been cut out of the market, which has serious consequences for the security and the sovereignty of the Québec food supply system.

Source: www.alternatives.ca/fra/journal-alternatives/publications/archives/2008/volume-14-no-10-juillet-aout/article/le-quebec-exclu-des-tablettes

globalisation of markets leads to the globalisation of problems, and as negotiations with the WTO drag ever on, the farmers of Québec believe it is time to collectively propose a fair and equitable vision of which food sovereignty is clearly the most important aspect²³.” On November 24, 2008, the UPA and a number of other groups representing civil society—agricultural, environmental, union, consumer, municipal, social, cooperatives, credit unions—joined forces and founded the new Coalition pour la souveraineté alimentaire²⁴. The Coalition’s objective is to promote the right of people to define their agricultural and food policy so as to ensure their right to food and food security based on their own physical and human resources.

Food sovereignty is a viable solution to the problems described previously. The Coalition pour la souveraineté alimentaire believes that “food sovereignty commits countries first to feed their populations from the resources of their agricultural lands and their human-scale farms. It represents an alternative to the blind liberalisation of agricultural trade advocated by the WTO, which has demonstrated serious failings and threatens our food security²⁵.”



If there is a movement on the part of Québec and other Canadian organisations and citizens to get involved locally to promote food sovereignty, the movement is even greater abroad. And there are many who are committed to providing concrete assistance to the people of developing countries in seizing control of their own food future.

Since the fall of 2009, the UPA-DI has been working with a Haitian organisation called Fondation pour le développement économique et social (FODES-5). With this organisation, an agricultural program based on training, the environment and economic development has been put in place. This project is supporting 100 agricultural operations and families in the Labrousse area. The intervention model being employed in the Haitian project is called Les Savoirs des Gens de la Terre (LSGT), which targets the training of peasants, the development of small land holdings, and the consolidation of operations. The brief training sessions support projects to improve small farm operations. The villages undertake to consolidate or develop services to members. An agro-environmental component involving the communities is also included to deal with problems of soil and water management.

Support for the renewal of food production and increased food security in Haiti

In Haiti, Oxfam-Québec is contributing to the renewal of food production and, thus, food security for the most vulnerable families. Since 2008, Oxfam-Québec has been working with a number of local partners to support the introduction of new agricultural and livestock technologies to improve production models. Along with the cultivation of basic food crops and small livestock operations, the project is promoting reforestation, the planting of fruit trees, and wind-protection for crops, a necessity on the island as a result of deforestation. The project focuses particularly on improving agricultural yields, local governance, and the strengthening of community organisations. At the conclusion of the project, over 40,000 farmers and their families will see sustainable improvement in their food supply, their health and their living standards.



Photo: Hector Comesa

It is becoming increasingly evident that the goals of social justice, the distribution of wealth, protection of the environment and equitable sharing of the land will never be achieved unless peoples here and elsewhere unreservedly demand food sovereignty. We make that choice every time we, as individuals, buy Québec or Canadian products in our supermarkets, when we support local institutions such as public markets, farm stands, community supported agriculture, etc., and when we urge our governments to adopt legislative measures to protect our land, our farmers, and economic and physical access, for all citizens, to a reasonable diet no matter where they live.

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- ¹¹ Note that this division in the distribution of land remains very present in Africa and Latin America. It is the focus of all current demands of the peasant movement.
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- ²¹ Via Campesina is an independent international movement, with no political or economic ties, formed by organisation of peasants, farm-workers, indigenous women and communities of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.
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