



tonnes of grain per hectare a year¹. Their production satisfies local needs, and a large part of the surplus is exported to countries lacking similar food resources.

Another 200 million farmers work on small holdings of a few dozen hectares. They live primarily in developing countries and in the rural regions of emerging nations. Through animal drawn implements, they work their fields and produce sufficient income to support their families and sell whatever surplus they have on local markets. Their annual production, in a good year, may average between ten and fifteen tonnes of grain per hectare.

But in the end, the majority of farmers (roughly a billion, the majority of them women) work exclusively with hand tools, like the spade, the hoe, the machete or the sickle. They live primarily in developing countries. They may cultivate not much more than a hectare per worker. Their production amounts to less than a tonne of grain per year². Obviously, the reality of all these farmers differs from one country to another. But they all share a common goal: to feed the world.



Photo UNESCO / Horst, Wagner

Ironically, 80% of those suffering from hunger in the world live in rural areas. Among those, 50% are families of small farmers and another 10% live as families of nomadic herders, fishers or forest workers. The remaining 20% belong to families of farm labourers or landless peasants. In other words, roughly 640 million people who go hungry in the world are in families that, even though their principal activity is agriculture, cannot feed themselves. There are numerous reasons for this aberration (see the pamphlet *The Challenge of Feeding the World*). Poverty is certainly the main factor. More than three quarters of those who live on less than a dollar a day are farm workers (approximately 900 million worldwide). A majority of those are women.

Living off the Earth, Here and Elsewhere

Agriculture: different realities

There are slightly over 1.3 billion people farming on the planet. They represent over 40% of the active population. Of this number, roughly 30 million practise a modern style of agriculture, based on mechanisation and the use of productivity inputs such as hybrid seed, mineral fertilisers and pesticides. As a general rule, they live in the North on farms like those in Québec. They are capable of producing the equivalent of 2,000



Photo Oriantal



When agriculture is a woman's work



According to the FAO, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, women in rural areas constitute a quarter of the world's population. Five hundred million of them live below the poverty line, even though their principal activity is agriculture. In Africa, women are responsible for 80% of agricultural labour, including cultivation, harvesting, transformation of products, their transportation to market, seed storage, and the procuring of water and firewood. In Asia, more than 60% of women cultivate the soil or have small livestock holdings, as do 30% and 40% of women in South America. The participation of women in agriculture has increased recently as a result of the

development of irrigated farming for export, which further increases the demand for female labour, including that of migrant workers³.

The importance of their role in agriculture is, however, little



Photo UNESCO /Roger, Dominique

A study in Africa showed that in a single year women carried over 80 tonnes of fuels, water and agricultural products over a distance of one km, compared to an average of 10 tonnes for men.

Source: www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit/french/fsheets/women.pdf

recognised. The agricultural work they do is commonly perceived as an extension of their regular household duties. Here in Canada, women often play a very important role on the farm: bookkeeping and budgeting, field or herd management, animal care, etc. More and more often, they are also part owners. While many work part-time on the farm, they also often hold down an outside job. Up to 1991, farm wives were considered to be "unemployed" by the

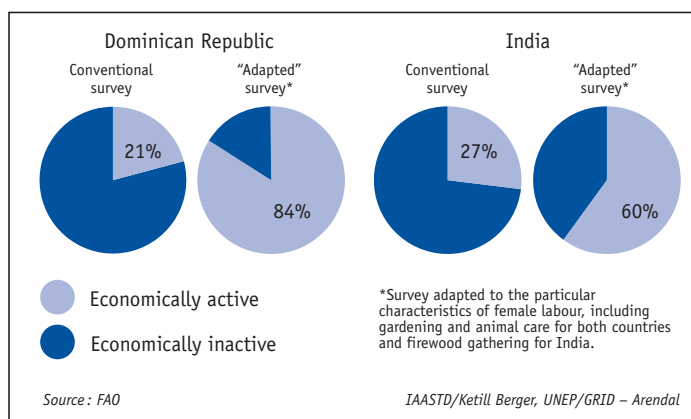
Canadian census. They now take an increasingly more active part on the farm. In developing countries, women continue to face a large range of inequalities. And the situation of the majority is deteriorating further. Their contributions to agriculture could be even more important if they had access to the same resources and basic services available to men. They have less access to education and training, to services related to their daily tasks, and to marketing channels. In a number of societies, both tradition and legislation prevent women from owning land. In India, Nepal and Thailand, for example, less than 10% of women farmers own their land. Consequently, they cannot obtain credit, and without credit they have difficulty obtaining even the most basic supplies—seed, tools, fertiliser—or making any investment that might improve productivity.

Everywhere, along with their male colleagues, they face the growing competitiveness of agricultural markets, rising demand

for flexible and cheap labour, growing competition for natural resources, a reduction in state support for small operations, and the redistribution of economic resources to the advantage of giant agribusinesses. They are also vulnerable to natural disasters and environmental change, to water shortages, and to heightened health and safety risks. The activities associated with World Rural Women's Day on October 15 of each year, the eve of World Food Day, are evidence of their desire to improve their working conditions and of the crucial role they play in the battle to conquer hunger⁴.

Labour by women in numbers

The estimate of the number of women "economically active" has increased significantly when tasks such as gardening, animal care and firewood gathering are taken into consideration.

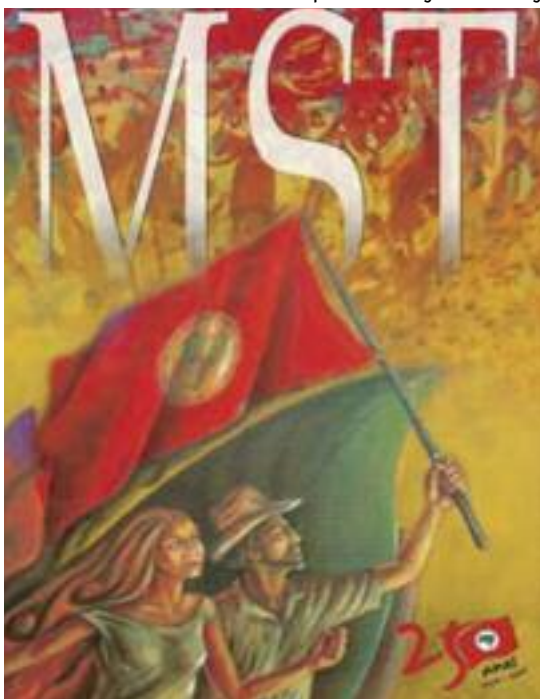


Common demands



Farmers around the world, both men and women, demand nothing more than the right to live from the land and to enjoy living conditions that provide for their basic needs. These battles are longstanding and are based, most of the time, on the issue of access to land. We describe elsewhere (see *The Earth on your Plate*, booklet 1) the peasant uprisings in Europe in the Middle Ages. For a century now the same demands have

been made. The cry of “Tierra y Libertad” (Land and Freedom) launched the Mexican revolution that gave birth to the first agrarian reform of the 20th Century, with the offer of land to those who worked it. Later, in China, Mao and the communists made this policy the heart of their reform. Their slogan was: “Geng zhe you qi tian!” (The land belongs to those who till it!). Following the Second World War, the United States took advantage of agrarian reform to consolidate friendly regimes (Japan, Korea) and to counter communist ideology that stressed the redistribution of land⁵. In Central America, access to land was one of the main causes of armed conflicts in the 1980s. Small peasants, without capital, means of production, or access to credit joined revolutionary movements to demand a share of the wealth.



region of the earth. Many die by gunshot, but as many kill themselves, driven to bankruptcy and misery by the landowners, multinational agribusiness and biotechnology companies, and by complicit governments⁶.

Today, the peasant organisations are joining together to oppose the globalisation of markets, which threatens the living of millions of farmers across the world. Globalisation, as currently practised, favours the concentration of holdings, the expropriation of small peasants, and land speculation. The situation is particularly difficult in urban areas, where access to

land and water often involve conflicting interests. Worldwide, 600 million farmers are working on the periphery of cities. In Québec, the Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA) has spoken out in support of a freeze in agricultural zoning to protect green zones and to restrict urban sprawl. “Agricultural land is not a renewable resource,” remarked the President of the UPA, Christian Lacasse, noting that no less than 1,027 hectares of agricultural land had been swallowed up by urbanisation zones of the urban communities of Québec City and Montréal between 2007 and 2009⁷.

Between urban development and globalisation, access to land takes on a new significance, figuring prominently on the agendas of various social forums (the Porto Alegre and Nyéléni Declarations). In 2006, the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) adopted a final declaration demanding that all governments implement policies of rural development that would encourage measures of agrarian reform to benefit poor and marginalised populations. The conference reaffirmed that land and access to natural resources were the basis of sustainable rural development as well as preservation of cultural and environmental viability⁸.

It was at the end of the 19th Century that farmers in Québec began to organise. At that time, the rules of the market favoured buyers over the farmers, who much outnumbered them. Farmers joined together and looked for ways to increase, secure and stabilise their incomes. On October 2, 1924, 2,400 farmers met in Québec City to create the Union Catholique des cultivateurs (UCC). The agenda of the meeting was ambitious: the general state of agriculture; agricultural training; agricultural credit; production and marketing of farm products; taxes; rural settlement; and, obviously, trade association. Today's agricultural unionism was born. Taking inspiration from the cooperative movement, they formed credit unions, electrical power cooperatives, cooperative projects, mutual insurance programs, as well as cooperatives for the purchase and sale of all products related to the farming economy. www.upa.qc.ca/fra/qui_sommes_nous/pages_histoires.asp

April 17, 1996, marks a sad anniversary. Nineteen peasants of Brazil's Landless Peasants' Movement (LPM) were slaughtered by assassins under contract to the large landowners. This massacre took place while Via Campesina, the first international workers' defence movement, was meeting in Mexico. To commemorate this event, April 17 was designated the International Day of Peasants' Struggle. Yet the bloody suppression of those struggles continues, with hundreds of victims every year in every

Two world visions in collision



Faced with the challenge of feeding the world, two different visions of rural development, agriculture and food production collide. On the one hand, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Bank wager that the globalisation of markets will eventually provide a fair redistribution of food resources across the planet. For that to happen, the food necessary to satisfy human needs has to be produced in massive quantities at the lowest possible cost possible from economies of scale. It presupposes the specialisation of production according to the characteristics of various countries. Rice, wheat or soybeans would be offered at the lowest price possible to the consumer,

whether he lives in Burkina Faso or Canada. It is also assumed the consumer earns enough to pay for these foods, which is clearly not always the case. This approach raises many fears. First, certain costs (social, environmental, greenhouse gases from transportation, etc.) are not included in the price. Second, the resources available from public institutions (grants, research, infrastructure, information, etc.) to support production are not equally distributed, neither among countries nor among producers, which has a fatal impact on the competitiveness of farmers. Competitiveness itself implies that there will be winners and losers. And the latter will invariably be among the billion poor peasants living in developing countries.

On the other hand, an alternative approach derives from the idea that every human being enjoys basic rights, in particular, the right to sufficient food, which was recognised for the first time in 1948 following the Second World War. "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food..." (Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). This right is integral to the notion of food sovereignty, that is, the right of a community, a population, a nation or a group of nations to

define for itself its food and agricultural policy in respect of the policies of others. The application of this approach lies in the world's most common agricultural model: the family farm. It is only possible where farmers join together, combine their human and material resources, make their voice heard and, through their rural associations, achieve recognition as full

partners in the development of food and agricultural policies⁹. That is essential to the concept of food sovereignty, which rejects savage competition between farmers and different food production systems in favour of resolving local food supply problems in cooperation with the population. This requires that the various decisional structures, from local to international, work together. Food sovereignty is, as well, the idea that the international market should be governed by higher values, such as human rights and, especially, the right to sufficient food, so as to create an international system to regulate the global market. This presupposes an active participation of consumers, in their role as citizens, throughout the debate to define agricultural policies.

Food security is access at all times by every individual to nourishment that is sufficient in quantity and quality to live a healthy and active life. The right of people to feed themselves is the affirmation that a "people," defined at different levels, from a local community to a whole region in a nation, has the inalienable right to choose the model for the way it feeds itself.
Fondation Charles-Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme

Supporting small farmers

The peasants of the Yungas de Corani region of Bolivia have long been producing hot peppers (locotos) for market. However, this monoculture has not been without problems: slash and burn clearing, soil degradation, lower yields, more frequent blights, the use of chemical fertilisers, insufficient profits, etc. This concentration of production to the detriment of market farming has resulted in serious nutritional deficiencies and protein-calorie malnutrition of the population. Working with L'ŒUVRE LÉGER, the organisation INCAS is helping peasants get back on their feet. Through the training it provides in agriculture, environmental protection and

nutrition, as well as aid in the form of technical assistance and microcredit, the peasants have been able to diversify their production (fruits, vegetables, corn, etc.) at the same time they have improved the quality and yield of their traditional pepper crop. Family vegetable gardens are flourishing, living conditions are improving, and the entire community is benefitting.



Photo L'ŒUVRE LÉGER

The family farm: a motor of development



“Agriculture expresses the personality of a people. Above and beyond the constraints imposed by climate and the biophysical environment, the way agriculture is practised reflects the choices of society and reveals a little of what we are and what makes us different.”

Report from the *Commission sur l'avenir de l'agriculture et de l'agroalimentaire québécois*, 2008

In 2008, the World Bank published a report entitled *Agriculture for Development*. The report clearly underlined that “there are countless examples of the role played by agriculture as the foundation of growth at the beginning of the development process.

Agricultural growth was the precursor of the industrial revolutions that arose in the temperate regions of the world, beginning with England around the middle of the 18th Century and finally reaching Japan at the end of the 19th Century. More recently, the rapid growth of agriculture in China, India and Vietnam has been the precursor of a rapid rise in the industrial sector. The special contribution of agriculture as the spark to growth is as well established as its contribution to the reduction of poverty¹⁰. The United States was early to see agriculture as a factor in development. As early as 1862, the Department of Agriculture inscribed on its arms the motto: *Agriculture is the foundation of manufacture and commerce*¹¹.



DIFFERENT TYPES OF AGRICULTURAL OPERATION

• The family farm model

The members of a single family manage the operation and provide the labour, at different levels. The work of family members is an essential component, even though additional temporary labour may be required at peak periods.

• The commercial farm or enterprise

The daily activities of these large-scale businesses are generally supervised by farm managers, rarely the owners. The latter want, for themselves and their shareholders, a profitable investment. The structure of these operations is similar to that of any other business, and the work is performed entirely by paid employees.

That being said, there is no general agreement on the type of agriculture that best achieves this double objective of economic growth and fighting poverty. The proponents of neoliberalism,

among them the World Bank, base their argument on the efficiency of productivist agriculture and its ability to generate income which, in turn, supports social development. They doubt the ability of small family farming to produce the same effect. However in Africa, in particular, agricultural policies that promoted the liberalisation and the privatisation of markets have not resulted in the expected development, primarily for small family operations. If those policies have been profitable for large agricultural enterprises and filled the coffers of certain governments, they have left the small peasantry behind, depriving them of the same access to the means of production as that accorded the agribusinessmen. They have not eliminated the volatility for prices for goods, further impoverishing rural areas. They have not been able to control the over-exploitation of natural resources, nor to adequately regulate the environmental impact of their agricultural practices. The defenders of large-scale agricultural operations nonetheless blame small family operations for the inability of African agriculture to compete. According to that reasoning, small-scale family farming is archaic, unproductive, uncompetitive and poorly adapted to the market. However, when this variety of agriculture receives the slightest support, the reality is quite the opposite¹².

Family agricultural operations

- *Export-oriented family farm operations.* Often highly specialised, these operations are organised around a single export crop such as cotton, coffee, fruits and vegetables. They are subject to the significant risks of market fluctuations and low prices on the world market.
- *Family farms where market crops serve to balance crops for export.* These often have a diversified production that protects them against climatic instability and market risks.
- *Family farms producing crops exclusively for the local market.* Part of the production satisfies the needs of the family; the rest is sold primarily at local markets. This category of operation includes some of the poorest households. Subject to local risk as well as the liberalisation of local markets, they have only limited access to resource inputs and to markets, few materials, and little livestock.
- *Subsistence family agriculture.* Production primarily provides for the needs of the family, with the rare surplus sold or bartered at the local market. This type of agriculture is becoming increasingly less common.

Source : www.oxfamsol.be/fr/Agriculture-familiale-et-securite.html

Family agriculture has, for the past thirty years, received little or no benefit from the public development assistance programs and agricultural policies of the nations of the South. It has similarly been ignored in much of the discourse of international institutions. In most of these countries, there is an observable discrepancy in access to public resources between the family farm and the managed capitalist operations. In a number of countries, the lion's share of public funds for agriculture is committed to supporting those huge operations. Similarly, it is those operations that have enjoyed preferred access to credit and land.

However, it is family farming that is the support of half the population in developing countries. In Africa, it constitutes the

Photo www.ideesailleurs.fr/images/tenture-africaine-agriculture.jpg

principal source of income and subsistence for 70% to 80% of the population. The lack of recognition and support for farmers threatens their future along with those styles of agriculture arguably better adapted to sustainable development. Family farming has a number of advantages. When it receives support, it can increase yields through techniques adapted to the circumstances and produce sufficient surplus for local markets. It was, in fact, this style of agriculture that has in part met the formidable challenge posed by the demographic explosion in Africa, where the population has more than doubled in the past twenty-five years. By creating numerous stable jobs in the countryside, it has also stemmed the exodus to the cities in many countries and helped to keep rural regions alive. Diversified, it has frequently functioned as a buffer against poverty when agricultural prices have plummeted or when nature has wrought havoc. Finally, family farmers remain in the best position to sustainably manage resources, as they are always the first victims of environmental degradation. Not only do family farms exploit natural resources (soil, water, forests, biodiversity) in a broad range of agro-environmental contexts, they play an irreplaceable role in the sustainable management of those resources. In times of crisis, they are always there, whereas capitalist operations have a tendency to drop the agricultural sector and park their capital in sectors they consider more profitable.

Rural solidarity



More than ever, the future of family farming lies in solidarity—solidarity among farmers locally and regionally, solidarity between farmers in the North and the South, and, finally, solidarity between farmers and citizens. Because, when you get right down to it, they have a common need.

Throughout the world, family farmers are facing similar problems. They are demanding fair access to resources, whether land, water, credit, the means of production, or seed. They are all fighting to obtain a fair price for the goods they produce, to have sufficient resources to satisfy their families' needs, and to be recognised for the essential social and economic role they play. They

are all looking for ways to adapt their practices to better respond to the demands for protection of health and the environment. They share the desire to feed the world with products of high quality and in sufficient quantity. And, finally, they are aware that they are sons and daughters of the soil and cherish the human dimension of their work.

Agriculture creates a unique relationship with nature, natural features and the environment, a relationship that gives farming its particular character and makes it, indeed, a separate culture. The agricultural producer is rightfully proud of his role as provider. He feels part of a great tradition and the custodian of an ancient heritage; he feels responsible for preserving that heritage and passing it on to the next generation, ideally his own family. The farmer is proud to be his own boss; it is extremely important to him that he be master in his own house.

Report from the *Commission sur l'avenir de l'agriculture et de l'agroalimentaire québécois*

While for thousands of years, family farms worked largely to satisfy the dietary needs of those in their own vicinity and decisions that concerned them were taken at that level, that is clearly no longer the case. They have all become, to various degrees, integrated into an economy that has become increasingly more globalised, where decisions are taken far from the farmers themselves. To protect their rights and to live in dignity, they have more and more joined with others in peasant organisations. Together, they organise their production, exchange information, cooperate in the marketing of their product, and manage supply to avoid uncontrolled price fluctuations and the waste of resources. They share a desire to adapt practices to the needs of the environment and to manage common resources in a sustainable way. They collaborate with training centres and research institutes, when these are available, to innovate and implement techniques better adapted to their situations, to adopt practices of sustainable agriculture, and to preserve biodiversity and the quality of water and the soil. They work together to respond to consumer demand for products that are healthful and of high quality. In short, they organise collectively to make out as best they can and defend their rights in the

current context of economic liberalisation and globalisation, to make their voices heard wherever national and international policies are being formulated, and to be better represented on national and international political forums.

In Africa, in particular, there has been rapid and substantial growth of these associations and their members, often to fill a void created by the withdrawal of state involvement and to take advantage of democratic overtures providing civil society with greater influence on government policies. Between 1982 and 2002, the percentage of villages with producers' associations went from 8% to 65% in Senegal and from 21% to 91% in Burkina Faso. Since 2000, these associations have joined together in the Réseau des organisation paysannes et de producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA), a body that has spoken out on international issues and that has succeeded, vigorously and effectively, in promoting peasant agriculture and family operations through national, regional (West Africa) and international legislation. For the peasant organisations of ROPPA, the rural family is the cornerstone of agrarian societies in African countries.



Photo upadi-agri

ROPPA is supported in its activities by organisations of agricultural producers in developed countries. In Québec, most of that support is provided by UPA Développement international¹⁴, a non-profit corporation created in 1993 by the Union des producteurs agricoles. Its mission is to promote a "peasant to peasant" cooperative model. Its raison d'être consists of providing support to the family farm as a model of sustainable agriculture by supporting democratic peasant organisations, collective marketing systems for agricultural products, as well as various other initiatives shaping the future of agriculture in developing countries. The UPA-DI and ROPPA have also jointly signed a powerful defence of food sovereignty entitled *Entre fracture agricole et désordre alimentaire*¹⁵. Other Canadian non-governmental organisations have their own concrete projects to support family farmers and peasant organisations in developing countries. This cooperation is of vital importance to the organisations that benefit from it. Above and beyond any financial aid and technical assistance it provides, it enables farmers from both the North and the South to realise the extent to which their goals are the same. With knowledge of that shared reality, they can face

international bodies in a common front to defend their right to live off the earth and to feed the world.

In the end, it is essential to develop solidarity between farmers and other citizens. In Québec, the family character and the human dimension of operations are a part of our agricultural heritage. Despite pressures from society and the market to produce more at lower cost, the family character of the farm remains firmly rooted in the very concept farmers have of what they do. Historically, Québécois have regarded agriculture as their principal instrument of economic, cultural and social survival. Our agrarian past has shaped a number of traits of our collective personality. Our ties to the rural environment remain very real in many ways, since we have, only recently, become an urban society¹⁶. However, our favourable prejudice toward the agricultural world is gradually eroding, creating a rift between the urban and the rural. The agricultural milieu, in Québec and elsewhere in the world, has been living a series of difficult challenges.

"For me, agriculture is leaving a farm in the same good condition I found it in, limiting the use of any products harmful to the environment and human health, living off my land by using the earth's resources to feed the population, supporting my region by providing jobs, and participating in the creation and maintenance of a local dynamic."

Jean-François DABILLY, French farmer

In Québec, the first salvos were fired by defenders of the environment who pointed a finger at agriculture. In the 1990s, the concentration of certain livestock operations, notably pork producers, and the problems of manure disposal were having a negative impact on the environment. To restore the balance between the presence of livestock and the capacity of the land to absorb manure, the Québec government adopted regulations to slow down and temporarily even stop further development of certain livestock production. For their part, farmers were obliged to revise their practices to make them more environmentally friendly.

UPA-DI works in partnership with peasant organisations in Africa, Latin America and Asia to strengthen their ability to act collectively for the agricultural development and quality of life of peasant families. In West Africa, the UPA-DI is supporting, in particular, the development of agricultural organisations. In Bénin, the organisation has helped the Groupement des exploitants agricoles (GEA) to form a permanent administration and create departmental and specialised associations, while providing consultant services on collective marketing systems for agricultural products, especially cashews, palm oil and rabbits. Oxfam-Québec is actively participating in that project. In Burkina Faso, the UPA-DI supports the Union des groupements pour la commercialisation, whose mission is to develop and manage a collective marketing system for organic grains and hibiscus flowers. L'ŒUVRE LÉGER is among the Canadian organisations supporting that project.

In Europe, the highly publicised mad cow and foot-and-mouth crises, then, at the beginning of the new century, avian flu (Asia), BSE* (western Canada), and food poisonings from fruits and vegetables (U.S. and Mexico) irrigated by water of doubtful quality, raised concerns about the healthfulness and safety of foods. Québec agriculture was, at the same time, hit by a spectacular increase in global trade and price competition between our agricultural products and those from the rest of the world that were invading our markets. These crises of confidence had a powerful impact on Québec farmers.


It is only now that we begin to see the considerable efforts Québec farmers have made to eliminate or reduce the impact of their activities on the environment, to improve their agro-environmental performance, and to develop good relations with their neighbours. The dramatic rediscovery of public markets, the growing attraction for Québécois to local products, and the popularity of community-supported agricultural programs are initiating a new discussion. Increasingly aware of the reality of the Québec agricultural community and better understanding the effects globalisation is having on farmers, citizens are realising that the future of agriculture, here and elsewhere—of an agriculture of family farmers, close to the earth, respectful of the environment, that can feed both their children and the world—depends on the choices we make. It's our move!

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- * BSE: bovine spongiform encephalopathy, better known as mad cow disease.

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