



Beyond Borders: The Struggle for Food Sovereignty in the Americas

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ABSTRACT. For decades now, small producers have identified and resisted major problems that underline the current model of industrial food production, distribution, and consumption. Indeed, family farmers and peasants have long understood the risks and felt the multiple impacts of the globalizing model of agro-industrial development, which is based on export-oriented and capital-intensive monocultures. This article first distinguishes food sovereignty from food security before presenting sociopolitical movements fighting for food sovereignty, both in the North and the South of the Americas, as a way to maintain or develop innovative and sustainable models of agriculture, with examples from Mexico, Brazil, and Québec, Canada.

KEYWORDS. peasantry · rural social movements · food sovereignty · agriculture · globalization

INTRODUCTION

Since 2008, food, energy, and economic crises have combined in raising key questions and concerns for politicians, consumers, farmers, food and environmental justice activists alike, about the functioning and impact of the globalizing food systems. Transnational organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations have also been part of the discussions about how to proceed and what to do in order to avoid existing problems and better address the needs of a growing world population, especially since the most marginalized sectors regularly survive without sufficient food (World Bank 2010). For decades now, small producers have identified and resisted major problems that underline the current model of industrial food production, distribution, and consumption.

Family farmers and peasants have long understood the risks and felt the multiple impacts of the globalizing model of agro-industrial development, which is based on export-oriented and capital-intensive monocultures. Their livelihoods, their modes of farming, and their cultures have been under threat since the so-called Green Revolution of the post-World War II era that pushed for greater “productivity” through increased agrochemical, technological, and energy inputs. Despite a generalized lack of mass media and academic attention vis-à-vis peasant organizations, small farmers, rural women, and peasants continue to organize, innovate, and defend their modes of living and social reproduction. In many parts of the world, they use more sustainable methods not because it is trendy or more profitable, but simply because it is their traditional way of farming (Altieri 2010) and/or because they lack the necessary resources to incorporate expensive agrotoxics (i.e., pesticides), energy-intensive methods (i.e., petroleum), and genetically modified seeds into their production.

This article first specifies the differences between food sovereignty and food security. It then presents examples of sociopolitical movements fighting for food sovereignty, both in the north and the south of the Americas, as a way to maintain or develop innovative and sustainable models of agriculture, with examples from Mexico, Brazil, and Québec, Canada.

FROM FOOD SECURITY AND THE GREEN REVOLUTION TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY CAMPAIGNING

In the context of the Green Revolution, the concept of food security emerged primarily to refer to the efforts made to produce and make accessible sufficient food for everybody, as a response to the needs of a growing world population. For decades now, development agencies and transnational corporations (TNCs) have used this concept to justify large-scale monocultures and the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to feed the “poor” (see Shiva 1997). Hence, the methods of production or the quality of the products is not the main concern here, as long as each individual is able to feed himself or herself. During periods of famine and crisis, and throughout the Green Revolution, the intensification of single-crop farming was favored in addition to the use of new technologies and pesticides with the goal of producing more food faster.

Nonetheless, there were always multiple voices and forms of resistance to this model. These became more visible and pervasive during the 1990s, with the increasingly evident and negative impacts of neoliberal policies in many countries. With the Uruguay Round of negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), agriculture became part of international trade regulations for the first time, which was later incorporated within the regulatory framework of the WTO, created in 1995. The multiplication of mass protests and people's summits denouncing neoliberal or corporate globalization, like the ones in Seattle (1999) and Cancun (2003), amplified the criticisms vis-à-vis trade liberalization processes in particular, which became a central element of the discourses of what are now known as alter-globalization movements (see, for example, Amoores 2005; Beaudet, Canet, and Massicotte 2010; Gills 2000; Juris 2008; Munk 2007; Naples and Desai 2002; Santos 2006; Whitaker 2006).

Indeed, it was in parallel to the Uruguay Round negotiations that many peasant and small farmer organizations chose to unite their forces and create La Via Campesina (LVC) in 1993, which was one voice among many others during the Battle of Seattle in 1999. Today, this transnational network is present in sixty-nine countries that span four continents, and it continues to grow, especially in Asia and Africa (Desmarais 2007; Borras 2008). Yet, this broad network of diverse peasant-led organizations does not only oppose neoliberal policies and the dominant export-led model of industrial agriculture; it also promotes and seeks ways to maintain or to implement alternative ones, based on the principles of food sovereignty.

In contrast to food security, the concept of food sovereignty begins with the affirmation of small producers' dignity, knowledge, and capacity to govern themselves. As Menser (2008, forthcoming) have argued, food sovereignty goes beyond fair trade or organic campaigns that mainly focus on consumers' rights and health (and sometimes environmental) issues, to take into account the rights of producers to control their lives and the food systems. Indeed, food sovereignty emerged from peasant and small farmer organizations in 1996 as a way to contest the recuperation of the concept of food security by state and interstate organizations, and to define themselves the priorities and methods of agricultural production and distribution. Another key concern is the concentration and control of food systems in the hand of a few powerful TNCs.

As highlighted by Holt-Giménez (2009), food sovereignty emphasizes self-governance of the food system by those who actually live on the land and cultivate the soil. It became a strategic and flexible tool for rural farming communities in various contexts to fight for maintaining or regaining their capacity to decide what kind of food they produce, how they produce it, and at what scales this food is to be distributed and consumed. Food sovereignty also recognizes the rights of states and citizens, producers, and consumers to control the food systems in order to ensure good living conditions, including access to healthy food and ecosystems that respect and promote the diversity of both biological and human cultures. Food sovereignty activists thus oppose the agro-industrial model, as it is based primarily upon mass production and exportation that results in negative ecological impact due to the long distances traveled and the use of pesticides, in addition to its negative social impact on many rural communities.

Pitted against increasing competition in the globalizing food chains and markets, where the largest producers are the ones that mostly benefit from infrastructure, (inter)governmental rules and subventions, many small- and medium-size farmers have lost their land, their work, their culture, and their livelihoods. Yet, they are not about to disappear. A growing number of rural communities are organizing and linking up across localities, borders, and sectors with indigenous movements, ecologists, researchers, and NGOs, promoting sustainable development based on social and environmental justice. Together, they contest the common understanding that large-scale agriculture is necessarily better and more efficient than small-scale farming. Through alternative practices, they seek to demonstrate the essential contribution that small food producers make in our society and for the future well-being of people and the environment. The campaign for food sovereignty has been very successful in rallying a large number of groups and actors, both in the North and the South, who are promoting and seeking to put into practice alternative socioeconomic and cultural models of agriculture, which have become so urgent with the ongoing crisis of today's model of production, consumption, and trade on a global scale.

MEXICO

Peasants have historically been an important but often depreciated actor on the Mexican political scene. Indeed, current struggles in the

countryside are building on movements of resistance that date back to more than two centuries ago. Starting with the European colonization and the adoption of several liberal policies by the Mexican state since the nineteenth century, many peasant and indigenous communities were weakened, repressed, and decimated. In fact, the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 was led essentially by peasants, and it resulted in a reinstatement of their place in the agrarian structure via the legalization of collective property (*ejido*).

Under the leadership of the Partido de la Revolucion Institucional (PRI, or Institutional Revolutionary Party) and its predecessors, which basically governed without interruption for over seventy years in Mexico, the Confederacion Nacional Campesina (CNC) was created as part of the corporatist system to give a voice to peasant organizations. Yet, as Barry explains (1995), this institutional channel quickly became a populist instrument used by successive presidents of the Republic to win elections. On the one hand, they promised greater land reform and social justice for small-scale producers; on the other hand, they primarily privileged large-scale commercial producers (access to credit, subsidies, etc.) and a private-property regime at the expense of peasant and indigenous communities that collectively owned and lived off the land. With the agenda of modernization and industrialization, the main objective of the government was to foster productivity in the countryside by fewer but “effective” agribusinesses, to support the emerging industrial sector in Mexico. Indeed, the intensification and mechanization of agriculture resulted in a reduction in the number of agricultural workers needed, thus “freeing” a labor force reserve for urban industries, as well as allowing a reduction of the price of food as a form of indirect support to industries that face less pressure from worker unions for increased wages (Hellman 1983).

The struggles for land and agrarian reform continued during the period of rapid growth in Mexico (1940-1970), which coincided with the Green Revolution, but they took once again a new intensity with the failure of industrialization policies through import substitution (ISI), the debt crisis of the 1980s, and especially since the adoption of neoliberal policies by the Mexican state, in partnership with economic elites and international institutions. These combined policies have contributed to the consolidation of a key actor on the national and international scenes: large transnational food-processing companies. In preparation for the instauration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that took effect in January 1994, a major change

in the Mexican agrarian system was introduced under the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.¹ The constitutional reform of Article 27 in 1991 had essentially legalized the privatization of *ejidos* and the system of collective property in Mexico. The Mexican state has therefore authorized land privatization, deregulation, and the opening of markets to global competition and foreign investors, in addition to the reduction of public investments and government subsidies to the agriculture sector.

The consequences of neoliberal policies were thus numerous and resulted in a profound reorganization of the Mexican countryside: destabilization of the peasantry, pauperization of rural populations, increased dependence on agro-industrial imports, loss of biodiversity, and other environmental impacts linked to the use of massive amounts of agrochemical products. Furthermore, the increasing influence of large agro-industries like Monsanto, Maseca, and Pilgrim Pride Corporation resulted in the imposition of a model of production dominated by cash crop monocultures. This model threatened food sovereignty and the means of the subsistence of thousands of small- and medium-size Mexican farmers. It was in the context of neoliberal policies and the implementation of NAFTA in 1994 that peasant organizations began once again to fight for recognition, defend their model of agriculture, and revitalize peasant agriculture. Over the past three decades, numerous autonomous peasant organizations, independent of the Mexican state, which include fisherfolk and forest dwellers, emerged at the local, regional, and national levels. Some have developed important networks nationally and transnationally in an attempt to reinforce their common struggles, like the UNORCA (Union Nacional de Organizaciones Rurales Campesinas Autonomas). Today, and since the second international conference of La Via Campesina in Tlaxcala, Mexico, in April 1996, food sovereignty is at the heart of their claims for justice and another model of agricultural development and stewardship.

After the eviction of millions of agricultural workers and peasant families that deprived them of their land and their rights to work and dignity, they are fighting back. They are organizing at all levels to assert their central and multiple contributions to society and the environment, as agents of their own economic, sociopolitical, and cultural development that brings benefits much beyond the Mexican countryside. While the multiple impacts of NAFTA, narco-trafficking, and migration have destabilized so many rural communities, many Mexican peasant

and indigenous communities are calling for a radical transformation of the current agrarian and food systems.

The first national mobilization campaign that united a broad coalition of peasant and indigenous organizations with other popular sectors was launched in January 2000, under the name *El Campo No Aguanta Más* (The Countryside Can Take No More). This was a historical moment as for the first time, so many autonomous and traditionally PRI-affiliated peasant organizations joined forces and took to the streets by the thousands (Bartra and Otero 2009). They explicitly called for food sovereignty, the exclusion of agriculture from NAFTA, and rejected the dominant model of agriculture, which threatened their very survival. They also reclaimed their right to self-determination—meaning, their capacity as small producers to decide their own methods of production—and the right to a healthy and adequate diet. Participants affirmed that an important reconfiguration of Mexican agrarian policies was necessary for small food producers to be considered as a key pillar of a socially just agricultural and food system that is economically viable, healthy, and respectful of the diversity of ecosystems and cultures. Therefore, these actors demand recognition of the multifunctional character of peasant agriculture.

The pressure from popular forces led to the conclusion of an agreement (ANC, *Acuerdo Nacional para el Campo*) with the federal government in 2003.² However, this agreement was far from responding to all the demands and hopes of numerous participants and organizations, some of which have refused to ratify. Until now, the divisions and tensions that emerged among peasant organizations remain, and the situation in the countryside has not improved in any significant ways, as the detractors feared. Based on various perspectives and initiatives, most participants continue to defend small-scale agriculture and to promote food sovereignty. In June 2007, for instance, the national campaign *Sin Maíz No Hay País*³ was launched by multiple organizations in order to maintain the pressure on the government and to defend small-scale production models that are so central to preserve biodiversity and indigenous cultures in Mesoamerica, the center of origin of corn.

Multiple types of action are also undertaken by these and other movements in an effort to voice their rejection of the current agrarian system and promote more sustainable models of agriculture at the local level. The *Red en Defensa del Maíz* (Network in Defense of Corn) is another important initiative led primarily by indigenous and peasant

communities and which emerged with the evidence of the contamination of native corn by GMOs (see Quist and Chapela 2001). These actions take many forms, including saving and exchange of native seeds, trainings in sustainable agriculture, protests at the regional and national levels, boycotts of imported food products and food aid, promotion of local food and markets, occupation of public institutions, as well as seminars and workshops to raise people's awareness not only of the impact of agro-industries and the use of GMOs but also of the alternatives offered by food sovereignty. Many organizations also chose to plant corn in public places. These highly symbolic actions aim to underline the vast biodiversity of native corn varieties still present in Mexico, as well as the risks associated with the massive importation of nonlabeled transgenic seeds into the country. Food sovereignty takes all its significance here as the recognition of this right can allow peasants to maintain their techniques of production while preserving Mexico's cultural and biological diversity. The proponents of food sovereignty also seek to create alliances between rural and urban citizen groups nationally and across borders with the hope of eventually bringing about major sociopolitical changes in the dominant model of food production and distribution. In Mexico, there is an urgent need for such alliances as populations in the countryside continue to face so many difficulties.

BRAZIL

Social movements fighting for food sovereignty are equally present in Brazil. Marked by decades of colonial domination, this country also experienced twenty-one years of military dictatorship that left profound wounds on its citizens. Indeed, this historico-political context resulted in a greatly unequal division of the territory that favored large landowners and, more recently, TNCs, to the detriment of the working and rural classes. Even today, Brazil is one of the most unequal societies in the world, where 46.8 percent of arable land is controlled by 1.6 percent of Brazilian landowners. Toward the end of the military regime (1964-1984), diverse popular sectors began mobilizing people to call for the return of democracy and public policies that would address the needs of the majority of Brazilians. It is within this context of political turmoil and genuine hope for change that the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST, Landless Rural Workers Movement) was established in 1984. The MST is currently one of the

most influential movements in Brazil and in Latin America, known for its mass mobilizations, direct action tactics, and open opposition to the neoliberal model of development.

Active in twenty-three out of Brazil's twenty-seven states, the MST is currently composed of more than 1.5 million members and is a key participant in various sociopolitical networks such as La Via Campesina and the World Social Forum. Beyond the call for food sovereignty, the MST and its allies push for the right to food as well as the right to choose the methods of production and the types of food that one can eat. In so doing, the Brazilian Landless Movement proposes and supports the development of an alternative way of life that emphasizes the right of each individual to live and work with dignity. In their daily struggles for land redistribution and for access to adequate food, the MST has become an important advocate of food sovereignty.

Among the "MST Ten Commitments to the Earth and to Life," for example, which influence the organizational structure and ethical basis of the movement, many directly refer to the values and principles associated with food sovereignty:

1. Love and care for the Earth and all natural beings.
2. Always work to improve our understanding of nature and agriculture.
3. Produce food to eliminate hunger. Avoid monoculture and pesticides.
4. Preserve the existing forest and reforest new areas.
5. Take care of the springs, rivers, dams, and lakes. Fight against the privatization of water.
6. Beautify the settlements and communities, planting flowers, medicinal herbs, greens, and trees.
7. Take care of trash and oppose any practice that contaminates or harms the environment.
8. Practice solidarity and revolt against any injustice, aggression or exploitation practiced against a person, the community or nature.
9. Fight against *latifundia* [and] for all that possess land, bread, studies, and freedom.

10. Never sell conquered land. Land is the ultimate commodity for future generations. (Friends of the MST 2011)

The MST's primary objective is to create alternative methods of living based on food sovereignty and the right to cultural diversity. To achieve this, the MST participants fight for the establishment of legal and territorial changes by constantly putting pressure on all levels of government. They require major sociopolitical changes via a more equitable redistribution of land, which would allow rural communities to be more autonomous and govern themselves, their development and their territory.

Land occupation is a type of direct action primarily used by the movement in an attempt to reject the historical use of space and allow most marginalized sectors access to the land. Although more and more unemployed urban workers are joining the MST, majority of the members are small producers that have either gone under or been evicted from their land. Oftentimes, these are children or grandchildren of peasant families that are too numerous to obtain land or redivide it among all of them, or former rural families who have been displaced by large hydroelectric or mining projects. Occupation plays an essential role in putting pressure on government to implement the expropriation and the redistribution of land. This process consists of different but equally important steps.

The first step is for the leaders of the MST to choose a region and a piece of land legally suitable for agrarian reform. Essentially, the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 underlines the social function of land that should be redistributed when it is not used for production or is not utilized to its potential by landowners. The second step consists of mobilizing landless workers and their family and informing them about their legal rights, the occupation process, the risks involved, and the possibilities of obtaining legal title. Having a sufficient number of participants essentially avoids repression and helps to convince authorities of the need to redistribute and legalize property titles. Once these steps have been established, the third step is the actual occupation by the masses, forming an encampment (*acampamento*), with the support of other members of the MST who have already lived through a similar occupation process. These are the early stages of a long process that can last months and even years, often implicating several forced

displacements and reoccupations. As Rangel Loera (2010) argues, life in the encampments is fundamental for participants to learn to know and trust each other, and to develop the basis of a collective identity and participatory democracy. The *acampamento* is a privileged space that permits experimentation and other forms of socioeconomic organization, self-governance, and collective management of daily conflicts and activities, and which serves to assert people's commitment and status among the rank of the MST (Rangel Loera 2010).

Once negotiations with the state are successful, the occupants obtain an official title and can establish more permanently through the construction of reinforced dwellings. They also decide, as a group, the type of land tenure and production. According to the real-life experiences of the occupants within these encampments and the leaders that emerge from them, certain MST communities opt for the creation of cooperatives where there is a rotation of tasks, while others prefer a more individualistic agricultural model, where individuals or small groups of individuals and families decide to unite their harvest and their land, or not. Through this process, many members of the MST start putting into practice the values of food sovereignty, as well as the experiences they learned while living in encampments. The pressure of land occupations and the large national mobilizations has resulted in tangible changes over the last two decades. Thanks to the constant efforts of its members and allies, the MST now consists of more than 2,000 *asentamentos* that have received legal titles; 400 associations of production, commercialization, and services; and 161 cooperatives of production, commercialization, technical assistance, and credits.

The democratization of the movement occurs not only throughout their political engagements and the daily participation of peasants, but equally through constant training and the valorization of peasant knowledges. Many training programs are offered to participants and their families: itinerant schools, alphabetization, political and technical formation of members and leaders. For example, the Florestan Fernandes National School fills the role of a popular university for members of the MST and various social movements and organizations, mostly those affiliated to La Via Campesina. Through similar schools, militants have access to university formation in medicine, law, agronomy, and agroecology, among others.

Formation in agroecology is directly linked to food sovereignty. Indeed, agroecology aims to promote and materialize sustainable agricultural practices that are more respectful of ecosystems and diverse

cultures throughout the world. It seeks to find ways for small producers to maintain or regain their autonomy and dignity, by rescuing and valuing peasant knowledges and best techniques, and by reducing their dependence on agro-toxics and external—public and private—forces. Since 2005, a partnership between La Via Campesina, the MST, the governments of Paraná and Venezuela, and the University of Paraná has permitted the creation of the first Latino-American School of Agroecology (ELAA) in Brazil, located on one of the settlements of the MST. This school offers a three-and-a-half-year university diploma where students are selected by their own movement and balances their time between the school and their native community, where they share and put into practice the skills and techniques they have learned. Through such programs, the MST and LVC continue to promote capacity building among their participants, in this case oriented toward a diversified and ecologically friendly model of peasant agriculture. They encourage the participation of small-scale producers throughout all processes of decision making and organization of life in rural and urban communities, as a way to deepen democracy and foster greater solidarity and collective action to build a better future.

QUÉBEC

Founded in December 2001 by a diverse coalition of individuals and groups in Québec, Canada, the Union Paysanne's first members were part of a provincial advocacy campaign, *Sauvons les Campagnes* (Save the Countryside), but from the start it also had transnational linkages. Indeed, the idea of creating a new "citizens' union" emerged at an international meeting of La Via Campesina in Québec City, during the Americas' Peoples Summit of April 2001. The strength of peasant movements from around the world, united in La Via Campesina, inspired small producers and advocates of the revitalization of the countryside not only in the South but also in the North, in this case, in Québec (Silvestro 2008). This young citizens' union was essentially created with the goal of promoting a peasant or small-farmer model for utilizing natural resources, strengthening rural lifestyle and agricultural production in Québec, as opposed to the dominant agribusiness model (Union Paysanne 2010).

The coordination council of the Union Paysanne is composed of ten members who ensure the political orientation of the union, decided during the annual general assembly. The membership is made

of small- and medium-size farmers/peasants, foresters, as well as concerned citizens and groups of urban dwellers who wish to contribute to a peasant-led agriculture and food system.⁴ Together, the members fight for the improvement of the precarious conditions of agricultural workers and rural families in Québec and beyond, as well as the construction of an alternative model of agriculture “at a human scale”—that is, grounded and controlled locally, and that takes into account the needs and hopes of small producers (Union Paysanne 2010). It also seeks to sustain democratic participation and the integration of young people and new farmers as central actors, which can positively contribute to maximizing regional development. Hence, like many other peasant organizations in Brazil, Mexico, and around the world, the Union Paysanne rejects the dominant model of food production and trade, adopted after the World War II, which has favored the capitalization and commoditization of agriculture, as well as the vertical integration of production now monopolized by a few transnational food companies (Silvestro 2008).

The Union Paysanne aims to counter the crisis of revenue of Québec farmers by granting a greater significance to socio-ecological conditions tied to food production. This crisis of income translated into a lack of interest among younger generations to pursue agriculture. For example, there were approximately 140,000 farms in Québec at the beginning of the 1960s, 61,257 following the 1971 census, but only 26,000 today. Among those remaining, they are three times more indebted than their peers in the United States and two times more than farmers from the neighboring province of Ontario (Union Paysanne website).

Considering this critical context in the Québec countryside, in 2007 a public commission was organized to reflect on the future of agriculture. The Union Paysanne used this opportunity to develop and present its vision of agriculture. In its *mémoire*, the Union Paysanne insisted on its own definition of food sovereignty: “local production of food, access to land, water and funding, be protected from GMO contamination and dumping, the right of a nation to have its own agricultural policies without external influences” (Union Paysanne 2007, 31; author’s translation). In the *mémoire*, the Union Paysanne also recognizes the particularity of the production model in Québec: the supply management. This system is imposing a quota on the production of milk, eggs, and poultry in order to guarantee a minimum price to producers and avoid overproduction. Even though the Union

Paysanne sees potential in the system, it claims that it has not achieved its objectives for all producers. Hence they call for the revision of the system and its renewal in order to improve the functioning of the system and make sure that recent and small producers can also benefit from it (Union Paysanne 2007, 8). The public commission made specific recommendations to improve the agricultural situation in its 2008 report, many in accordance with the Union Paysanne proposals, such as the reform of the supply management system, the end of the monopoly of the Union des Producteurs Agricoles (UPA), and the protection of agricultural territory. However, as of February 2011, such reforms have yet to be implemented (Commission sur l'avenir de l'agriculture au Québec 2008).

Today, the Union Paysanne continues to fight for a major reform of the Québec agricultural system, as well as a reform of subsidies and assistance programs, in an attempt to favor a healthier, diversified, and ecologically friendly model of agriculture. Nonetheless, its central battle at the moment is to put an end to the monopoly of the UPA. Since 1972, the UPA is the only farmers' union officially recognized by the provincial government to represent the interests of all Québec farmers, each one of whom are required to pay an annual membership fee of CAD 300 per year (or CAD 600 for a farmer-couple) to the UPA (Silvestro 2008, 115). The Union Paysanne is thus fighting to have the right to officially represent farmers, mainly those small-scale family farms and organic producers who do not feel well represented by the UPA. Many advocates of the Union Paysanne also suggest that they have a vision of agriculture that is very different from the one that used to be promoted by the UPA, which favors the "modernization" of Québec agriculture, emphasizing efficiency and productivity objectives, thus translating into the growing size of farms, mechanization, greater use of agrochemicals and GMOs, monocultures, and a reduction of the number of farms and workers.

Nonetheless, one needs to acknowledge that since the last few years, the UPA has been repositioning itself and integrating the very concept of food sovereignty and the need to transform today's model of production. This is due in part to national and transnational campaigns by the Union Paysanne, the National Farmers Union (NFU) in English Canada, and their allies within LVC who have denounced the potential and concrete impacts of the increasing control of the globalizing food systems around the world by a few mega-industries.

There is also a growing awareness and concern among consumers, producers, and some political institutions and think tanks about tainted food and health issues, including obesity and diabetes, listeria and salmonella outbreaks (Patel 2007). Now the problem is to understand to which extent the UPA is really advocating for a significant transformation of agriculture through its promotion of food sovereignty. Is it mostly a strategic rhetoric to counter the influence of the Union Paysanne as a competing union to represent Québec farmers, or are they really seeking to reclaim the control of food systems by small producers as well as a more sustainable model of agriculture? For now, the Union Paysanne seems quite skeptical about the commitment of the UPA and remains convinced that the interests of small alternative producers would be better represented by allowing multiple unions. One can at least conclude for now that the Union Paysanne is much more firmly opposing “factory farms,” farmerless agricultural zones, standardized products, the privatization of seeds, and the inclusion of agriculture in WTO and other free trade agreements than the UPA.

To promote concretely food sovereignty and the autonomy of small producers and family farmers, the Union Paysanne supports various initiatives adapted to the specific needs of the local people. For example, the organization favors the development of regional solidarity markets. In 2009, it initiated a partnership with Terroirs Québec, a group of independent stores promoting local agricultural products on the Internet and making available a wide variety of biological products grown and harvested locally. Since the creation of the Union Paysanne, several members have also participated in a network of community-supported agriculture (CSAs) in Québec; some members have developed their own CSA network. This successful model allows the creation of a direct partnership between urban consumers and rural producers, thus bypassing traditional market intermediaries. The relatively simple system is now well established. Participating urban families pay a fixed amount of money at the time of planting to a nearby farmer, and they receive a weekly basket of fresh and generally organic produce throughout the harvest season. Trying to reduce the cost of transportation, the families can pick up their baskets either at the farm or at designated locations closer to where they live. It is through the implementation of such initiatives, paired with an agricultural model of production that values diversity, that the Union Paysanne seeks to maintain the dynamism of Québec rural communities and hopefully redress farmers’

revenues. Food sovereignty cannot be realized without sustainable management of natural resources, which should be valued as a central contribution of producers who act as steward of local ecosystems while sustaining healthy rural and urban communities.

CONCLUSION

Despite the different sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and historical contexts in which these diverse peasant movements and organizations evolved in Mexico, Brazil, and Québec, they share many of the same needs, obstacles, and hopes. Their respective objectives are similarly centered on the demands and initiatives of many individuals and other popular movements that jointly struggle throughout the world for food sovereignty and the promotion of another form of agriculture and society. April 17, 2010, being declared the International Day of Peasant Struggle is an example of the transnational solidarity among small food producers and their allies. The day was celebrated with simultaneous activities and events across the globe. In Canada, for instance, farmers' organizations coordinated a campaign to stop genetically modified Monsanto alfalfa, while in Brazil, forty-two large properties were occupied and sixteen public initiatives called for the legal recognition and permanent settlement of ninety thousand new rural families.

These examples and the case studies presented above demonstrate the importance and multiplicity of locally grounded struggles of movements and individuals fighting for food justice, food sovereignty, and participatory democracy around the world. These struggles are not only an answer to the current food crisis. They simultaneously contribute to defying the dominant discourse and culture around food production and consumption, while making visible both the problems at the heart of the neoliberal model of production and trade, and the multiple alternatives that survive everywhere and that urgently need to be known and sustained by rural and urban citizens alike. Other models of agriculture already exist; other ways of life, of social (re)production, and of consumption must be nurtured.✿

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A shorter version of the article was published in *Possibles* and has been here translated by Jessica Brousseau. See Massicotte et al. (2010).

NOTES

1. Trade liberalization between Canada, the United States, and Mexico came into effect under the NAFTA rules on January 1, 1994. That same day, the now well-known Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN, or Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) began their armed insurrection in the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico. It became a powerful symbol that served to make visible the concrete struggles of indigenous and peasant families who are resisting the dominant model of development and governance. NAFTA was only one more instrument that threatened their way of life and culture, but since they had struggled for so many years to maintain an alternative model of agriculture and society without ever being heard or respected by institutional authorities, they chose to take arms to contest the imposition of this new regulatory framework (see Harvey 1998).
2. For participating organizations, see *Movimiento El Campo No Aguanta Más* (2003).
3. The campaign *Sin Maíz No Hay País* (No Corn, No Country) (see <http://www.sinmaiznohaypais.org/>) brings together numerous Mexican peasant organizations, intellectuals, and NGOs at the national level and remains active as a space for articulation, analysis, and actions (fieldwork interview with a participant, Mexico City, February 2011). See also <http://www.sinmaiznohaypais.org/prensa%20camp/Convocatoria.pdf>.
4. In Québec as in many regions of the global North, many small-scale and family producers do not call themselves peasants. This “identity” has been largely discredited as “backward” and about to disappear, following the dominant vision of “modern thinking” that has been internalized by many farmers who now tend to see themselves as autonomous producers/entrepreneurs. In Québec, many producers refer to themselves as “agriculteurs/trices.” Nonetheless, with the recent mobilizations and transnational campaigns of the *Confédération Paysanne* in France and *La Via Campesina*, among others, there is certainly a renewed valorization of the peasant identity, as people of the land, who live and care for the land. Some authors (see Ploeg 2010; Schneider and Niederle 2010; Ayres et al., forthcoming) are in fact highlighting the resurgence of a new peasantry, or re-peasantization, examining various efforts at removing food from the commodity system, and the consolidation of alternative, mostly local and regional, markets for small-scale food producers.

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