

editorial

emerging diseases and factory farming

What makes food safe?

Within the industrial food system, “safety” is all about managing the high risks created by this model of food production. Food is produced on monoculture fields or factory farms, with uniform breeds of plants and animals that are highly vulnerable to pests and diseases. In this context,

diseases can grow or mutate into more lethal forms, and, in the case of animals, transfer to humans and spread through corporate supply chains. To deal with their vulnerabilities, crops are genetically modified or doused with toxic pesticides, and animals are fed antibiotics and drugs, creating more health dangers. Then much of the food gets highly processed and sold through supermarkets, causing harms like diabetes and cancer.

More and more regulations and standards are imposed by governments and corporations to deal with these risks. But they typically only curtail the most serious excesses, without threatening corporate profits, and are alien to food systems based on traditional animal husbandry, markets and agroecology, where risks are low because of diversity, local knowledge, trust and small scale circuits. Those regulations have become a tool to expand corporate control and undermine the healthy food systems that continue to feed the majority of the world’s people and that are the only real solution to the harms of the industrial food system.

GRAIN



Illustration: Rini Templeton, www.riniart.com

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who we are

In the last years hundreds of organisations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organisations were present in the *International Nyéléni Forum 2007* and feel part of a broader **Food Sovereignty Movement**, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. **The Nyéléni Newsletter is the voice of this international movement.**

Organisations involved: AFSA, ETC Group, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for Food Sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Real World Radio, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, Transnational Institute, VSFJusticia Alimentaria Global, WhyHunger, World Forum of Fisher People, WAMIP.

now is time for food sovereignty!

Pandemic Research for the People¹ (PReP)

Capital investments invade forest frontier spaces for timber, urban development, mining, and industrial agriculture (livestock, monocultural crops, and the displacement of peasants by land grabbing). These processes fragment forest ecosystems and expand the number of multi-species interactions. Viruses transfer into human populations and the accelerated mandates of global trade and travel move flora and fauna (including infected humans) around the globe.

Mainstream science calls for ever more surveillance of forests, criminalising residents that live in and depend upon forest products. In combination with agroindustry, it also promotes “sustainable intensification” whose underlying logic is that the deployment of Green Revolution technologies on existing farmland will preserve forests. Nevertheless, profits from increased production drives agricultural expansion.

In contrast, agroecologists promote a “forest matrix” model that views people as integrated, essential components of ecological systems where food production is linked with conservation. This ecological framework dovetails with ongoing Indigenous, Black, and peasant land defence processes. Agroecology is a process of adaptation and mitigation that produces low energy, biodiverse ecosystems far more likely to be resilient in extreme weather events and to better regulate epidemiological cycles.

Top-down pharmaceutical responses to infectious disease outbreaks treat disease as an isolated, external agent targeting vulnerable human populations. Integrating agroecology as an infectious disease response approaches infectivity and disease spread as a possible (but not inevitable) symptom of complex human - nonhuman interfaces structured through racial-colonial regimes of global capital. For PReP, agroecology is crucial to combatting infectious disease, all while placing autonomy over land and livelihoods in the hands of the global peasantry.

1 - <https://www.prepthepeople.net/> or e-mail : rwallace24@gmail.com and alexliebman@gmail.com

Emerging diseases and factory farming

In 2008, as we followed a disastrous international response to the H5N1 bird flu epidemic sweeping Asia, we wrote: “The world is in the midst of big changes with respect to global diseases. We are heading [...] for more deadly types of disease, and more capacity for them to spread. There is also a greater probability of the emergence of zoonotic diseases and global pandemics. Yet the international response to this situation has so far failed [...] to reflect the seriousness of the crisis¹”.

The source of the problem was obvious: the rapid expansion of a model of animal farming in which thousands of genetically uniform animals are packed together and pushed to grow as fast as possible. These factory farms are breeding grounds for the evolution and amplification of lethal strains of diseases, with the possibility to infect humans —as the vast majority of new diseases affecting humans come from animals (known as ‘zoonoses’). The globalised structure of the industry, with its highly concentrated areas of production (including in deforested areas where there is risk of contact with wild animals) and its focus on exporting feed, meat and animals over large distances, create the conditions for disease to spread widely and rapidly.

The H5N1 bird flu epidemic should have questioned the promotion of factory farming and industrial meat. But the opposite occurred. Governments and international agencies blamed small farmers and traditional markets. They put in place a range of measures to protect the industrial meat companies, and used the epidemic as an opportunity to increase scale and concentration, leaving oversight for these deadly farms and meat plants in the hands of corrupt corporations and tycoons.

In 2009, a swine flu pandemic emerged in Mexico out of the globalised pork industry. This was followed by a devastating African Swine Fever pandemic that killed hundreds of thousands pigs in areas where factory farming had been expanding: Russia, China and other parts of Asia. Then came Covid-19, and while its exact animal origin is not yet known, corporate meat processing plants were a major source of transmission, affecting hundreds of thousands of workers, their families and friends. Bird flu has luckily not yet morphed into a pandemic strain, but a new variant is killing millions of wild birds and running out of control through the most tightly-sealed industrial poultry farms of North America, Japan and Europe.

Under the guise of “biosecurity”, governments and agencies like the FAO and the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) continue to promote measures to further industrialise livestock farming under corporate control. Approaches based on animal diversity, traditional knowledge and small-scale, localised production and markets, are ignored and even criminalised.

To stop this recklessness and keep the world safe from new pandemics, we have to end factory farming and defend and rebuild diverse, small-scale, localised systems of animal husbandry.

1 - Viral times - The politics of emerging global animal diseases, <https://grain.org/e/614>

The resistance against the expansion of mega pig farms and the defence of Indigenous territories, water, air, and nature in Latin America¹

Despite the serious harms they cause, pig factories are spreading from the United States throughout Latin America. These meat factories are part of the current dominant (and expanding) food regime, the grain-oilseed-livestock complex² through which grain and oilseeds (mostly genetically modified maize and soy) are used to feed the growing number of food animals. Unfortunately, if things do not change, by 2029, meat production will increase by 40 million³ and much of this meat will be produced in Latin America. As most of the meat is exported, there is a clear unequal exchange between those who benefit from the exploitation of humans, non-human animals, and nature (meat companies); and the communities—usually Indigenous, peasant, and Afro communities—who experience the multiple negative impacts of the industry.

Pig factories are industrial meat production operations that confine thousands of pigs in closed spaces, to focus their energy into producing meat. The production of meat under this capitalist logic pollutes water, air, and the soil. It is associated with land grabbing and health hazards (including pandemics), it is one of the largest contributors to climate change and deforestation, involves cruelty against animals and displaces other more sustainable and just forms of food. Pig factories are also associated with multiple rights violations, including the rights to land and territory, to a healthy environment, to water, to food, the rights of nature, human rights defenders and Indigenous Peoples⁴.

It is no surprise that there is a growing resistance against the expansion of agribusiness and specifically pig factories. In 2022, impacted communities, activists, organisations and academics met in Yucatan to discuss the growing problem of pig factories in the region. The declaration of *America without mega pig farms*⁵ solidifies the demand to promote food sovereignty, agroecology and ancestral food production, instead of subsidising and supporting agroextractivism and the need to stop meat factories.

Multiple collective actions have taken place to stop meat factories. Including, but are not limited to, citizen consultations, Indigenous self-consultations, campaigns, protests, occupations, and litigation⁶. When they have raised their voices, multiple peasants and Indigenous Peoples have suffered intimidation, criminalisation, and repression. At a regional level, multiple organisations have requested the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to grant a thematic hearing to address the cases of human rights abuses in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and the United States related to the meat industry.

1 - There are many documents made by the group that produces this article. See <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/3e7203cf44cf417c9b5fe1db7a182293?item=1> and <https://www.facebook.com/Guardianesdeloscenotes>

2 - Weis, T. (2013). *The ecological hoofprint: The global burden of industrial livestock*. Bloomsbury.

3 - Stiftung, H. B. *Meat Atlas 2021*.

4 - For more information regarding the meat industry and human rights violations, please visit the thematic hearing request presented by 20 organisations and supported by 243 in 2022, and again in 2023, available at: https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/industrial_animal_agriculture/pdfs/ThemaHearingCAFOENG.pdf?_gl=1*9ata34*_gcl_au*NTAyMDU4NDEyLjE2ODYyNDE3Mjk.

5 - The Declaration (in Spanish) is available here: <https://www.greenpeace.org/static/planet4-mexico-stateless/2022/05/d11b10b7-declaracion-de-america-sin-fabrica-de-cerdos-primer-borrador.pdf>

6 - For more information about Yucatan and elsewhere, you can visit the storymap (in Spanish): <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/3e7203cf44cf417c9b5fe1db7a182293?item=1>

Mega salmon industry in Chile pollutes, affects health and destroys local fisheries!

The salmon farming industry in Chile has been occupying and destroying protected areas and Mapuche, Kawesqar and Yagán ancestral territories for decades. The industry's abusive use of antibiotics and antiparasitic produces resistance to antibiotics vital to medical treatments for humans while affecting marine ecosystems. This process decreases the natural resistance of native species and increases the diseases that can affect them.

The salmon mega-industry has introduced at least 20 viral, bacterial and parasitic pathogens into the aquatic ecosystems of southern Chile. These events cause serious social and economic impacts on coastal gathering communities, especially in the Chiloé archipelago. Clams and other filtering bivalves are contaminated with neurotoxic and gastrointestinal toxins, leading to the sanitary closure of these areas to local fishermen and collectors¹.

After creating areas of “environmental sacrifice” and a case of ecocide, the foreign and Chilean-owned corporations export their billion-dollar products, certified as “environmentally friendly and socially responsible”. The fundamental problem is the productivist and extractivist model of nature exploitation, which permanently endangers life, health and biodiversity in our territories. Our protected areas and ancestral territories will not be sacrificial zones for the destructive salmon colonialism!

1 - For more info, Centro Eoceanos <https://www.ecoceanos.cl/>

nyéléni process: towards a global food sovereignty forum 2025

Voices from our allies

Claudio Schuftan, People's Health Movement (PHM) and World Public Health Nutrition Association (WPHNA), Ho Chi Minh City

Nyélení 2007 was a key pace setter to public interest civil society organisations' (CSOs) and social movements. It set a new tone for placing our demands to duty bearers. Fifteen years later, the time has come to reinvigorate the process to, not only sharpen our demands, but also to gather new forces to do so – thus showing the importance of the Rome meeting that took place last June (2023).

PHM fully agrees that the challenge is not to come up with a new Declaration created from above. It is the process of the next 18 months that will bring the struggle to the bases so that the outcome will be truly globally representative and will hopefully create the necessary counter-power. PHM is a network of networks of health and human rights activists, currently with an e-presence in 70+ countries. It was established in the year 2000 and is active on both global and national issues. Its current secretariat is based in Colombia (phmovement.org). PHM has a working Food + Nutrition thematic group very much in tune with Nyéléni supporters and activists, given the undeniable relationships between health and nutrition. In our work, our group links food sovereignty, agroecology, climate justice and the right to food to the right to health. We will take the Nyéléni process to our 3700 subscribers of the list server phm-exchange both to inform our constituents of progress and to collect their inputs to collectively work towards a 2025 Declaration. We are definitely all in.

The same is true for the work of WPHNA, a professional association of public health nutritionists, of which I am a member of its executive committee (www.wphna.org). WPHNA fully embraces the Nyéléni Principles. Our membership is around 500 worldwide. We are also definitely in.

voices from the field 1

“Water needs a collective voice” against pig factories in Yucatan

Ká'anan Ts'ónot / Guardianes de los Cenotes, testimony presented during the UN Human Rights anniversary in 2022

In Yucatan, Mexico, there has been a massive and accelerated expansion of pig factories. Today, there are at least 274 pig farms in the Peninsula. They have expanded despite environmental, social, and cultural conditions that should have prevented them from entering the region. This affects the metabolic relation with “cenotes”: sinkholes that connect a huge aquifer under the Peninsula with its communities.

In the town of Homún, the Guardians of the Cenotes has been defending their territory from pig farms. Through organisation, protest and litigation, the mega factory farm's operations were suspended in October 2018. However, the risk will continue until the pig factory is cancelled. Currently the case is waiting for a ruling from a federal court to decide on the right of the Mayan children to a healthy environment and the rights of the cenotes.

In Homún's region, Mayan communities struggle against the expansion of pig factories while defending water and life. In the word of a local human rights defender: “These cenotes are sacred places for our people, they are treasures, places where you can see life and how nature works. Nature works without voice, hands, feet. We need to stop, to pause, to see nature's generosity including clean water. This mega farm should NOT damage my town, will NOT kill the nature of our town...Water needs a collective voice... Just as we need air and water to live, they need us”.



One does not sell
the earth upon which
the people walk

Tashunka Witko, 1840 –1877

voices from the field 2 and 3

How pastoralists in western India manage livestock diseases

Documented by researchers at Anthra, www.anthra.org

Until recently, in western India, if a flock of sheep showed signs of sheep pox, male shepherds would sport a beard and spray vast amounts of turmeric all over the flock. While this may appear absurd to some, it is a logical practice. By sporting a beard and not shaving, the shepherd was sending out a signal understood by other shepherds of his community that his animals were sick, that they should keep their animals away and also check them for signs of illness.

Also, turmeric powder is known to have medicinal properties and it is used widely in India, not just for cooking but also as an antiseptic. This shepherd would also isolate himself, his family and his flock until the symptoms subsided so as to limit the infection. Shepherds and other pastoralists in India have dealt with diseases in their livestock for years using a combination of practices.

They have selected species and breeds suitable to the region they live in, managed grazing and water for their animals through migration, used herbs and household spices to treat their animals when sick and used "management" practices like the aforementioned to contain and limit the spread of disease.

My job became more dangerous

Bernarda Lopez (pseudonym), testimony to the US Congress

I am from Guatemala and have lived in the US for 24 years working in different Tyson meat plants. My job became more dangerous during the pandemic because I work shoulder to shoulder with my coworkers. We had to continue our work because we were named "essential workers". It is common for workers to go to work while sick to avoid getting disciplinary points for missing work. I was worried because my husband was convalescent due to a surgery, and I didn't want him to get Covid-19.

The company did not put in place effective safety measures and did not tell us anything about the cases that began to appear. We only saw that people began to miss work, but they never told us the reason. I began to have some symptoms of headache and I felt very tired. When I informed my supervisor, she would not let me go home. She told me that if I left, they would give me a point, to which I accepted because I felt bad. The next day I went back to work so I wouldn't get another point and risk getting fired. After work, I went to a clinic and tested positive for Covid-19. Inevitably, my husband was infected and passed away almost immediately.



voices from the field 4

Not enough veterinarians is no excuse

Attila Szócs, Eco Ruralis, Romania¹

There are hardly any vets for peasants and small farmers in the rural countryside in Romania, only about 1 for every 1000 small farms. Because of this, there is no capacity to deal with outbreaks of African swine fever, which have been affecting the country's pig farmers since 2017. The government's veterinary agencies simply order the mass kill-off of all pigs in any region where there is an outbreak.

In the case of small farms, the agency sends in teams to

go through villages, from farm to farm, shooting all the pigs in the head, and then they leave the dead pigs for the farmers to take care of.

The big farms have their own vets and management, and they sacrifice their own animals with the supervision of the agency. Big farms have received millions of euros in compensation from the government. In January this year, there was an outbreak at a Danish-owned breeding farm and 42 thousand pigs were culled.

1 - Building a factory farmed future, one pandemic at a time, <https://grain.org/en/article/6418-building-a-factory-farmed-future-one-pandemic-at-a-time>

voices from the field 5 and 6

Unjust standards lead to the disappearance of peasants

Nicolas Girod, Confédération Paysanne¹, France

[Regarding animal husbandry] We have unfair and inappropriate standards, based on a model that does not fit all peasants. This is leading to the disappearance of small farmers and to the conformity or exclusion of those who don't fit the mould. What we are pursuing through peasant farming is a different approach: a norm's objective can be met in different ways. But this is something that the authorities are unwilling to consider.

We recently had to deal with an outbreak of bluetongue disease. We call it an "export disease". It had been used by France as an excuse to block meat imports from infected countries, based on an exaggerated classification of risk. When bluetongue arrived on French soil, it backfired: other countries classified it in the same way and French farmers could no longer export till all territory was free from it. This meant vaccinating all animals, even those who were not much at risk, such as the dairy sector. We went to court and were found guilty—but not convicted—because we didn't want to vaccinate our animals. It's the kind of absurd thing that doesn't fit in at all with our autonomous grass-fed farming systems.

Nicolas Girod was recently arrested for his participation in the protests against the water mega-basins for industrial agriculture.

1 - Full article in French here: <https://reporterre.net/Les-normes-injustes-engendrent-une-disparition-des-paysans-17631>

Revitalizing regionalised meat production

Julia Smith, Blue Sky Ranch, British Columbia, Canada

In 2008, changes to meat processing regulations resulted in the loss of 80% of British Columbia's meat processing facilities. People who used to be able to buy a side of beef from the farmer down the road, now had to go to the grocery store and buy beef from the neighbouring province of Alberta. That animal may have been born down the road, but the loss of processing facilities meant that it now had to be sent to Alberta for finishing where it would be processed by one of the giant corporations who now process 95% of Canada's beef.

In 2018, a group of farmers in British Columbia formed the Small-Scale Meat Producers Association to fight for changes to enable farms to supply locally raised meat.

In 2021, we achieved new regulations that allow up to 25 animals to be slaughtered on-farm every year and we are now developing a "Butcher Hub Network" to support both on-farm slaughter and other regional meat processing operations. This includes projects like the design and build of a slaughter trailer that can be used by a professional butcher to provide services to multiple farmers licensed for on-farm slaughter.



voices from the field 7

Local breeds of chicken

Abdramane Zakaria Traoré, Centre Sahélien pour la Biodiversité

Local breeds of chicken provide a vital source of animal protein, eggs and income for many rural communities in Africa. Raised in family farming systems, they are often accessible even to farmers with limited resources and have exceptional resilience to disease because of their genetic diversity. Indigenous breeds are adapted to their specific environments and are more resilient to adverse environmental conditions and disease than imported commercial chickens.

Poultry diseases can cause huge economic losses and compromise food safety. However, African breeds of chicken have developed natural defence mechanisms that help them resist and recover more quickly from infections. They require less medication to prevent and treat disease than commercial breeds, which minimises the risk of antibiotic resistance developing and threatening human health. By supporting the breeding of African chickens and preserving their genetic diversity, we can strengthen food security, reduce dependence on antibiotics and improve the resilience of poultry farming systems, paving the way for a genuine transition to agroecology in Africa.