



Illustration: Marcia Miranda

editorial

a new framework for trade based on food sovereignty

The current international trade order was established to support the expansion of transnational companies and to keep colonial powers in control of the world's natural resources.

The World Trade Organization, the IMF, the World Bank, and free-trade agreements have been used to dismantle national policies that ensured people's sovereignty over national resources and local markets. For this reason, this edition of the Nyéléni Newsletter analyzes the impact of the current global trade system on national policies, particularly those that ensure fair prices for food producers and consumers.

We are striving to rebuild food sovereignty, which means changing the global trade system and allowing countries to develop policies that ensure a decent livelihood for all people, particularly small-scale food producers. Minimum support prices, public stock-holdings, supply management, public food procurement, and so forth: there are plenty of inspiring examples of public policies that ensure a fair income for rural people, guaranteeing that how our food systems are organized is a democratic discussion and not left to the 'markets'.

This edition of the Nyéléni Newsletter calls for an end to the exploitative model of capital expansion through free trade agreements. We explore the urgent need to break the hegemony of free trade and build an alternative that upholds solidarity and internationalism, and respects the diversity, autonomy, and food sovereignty of nations and communities.

La Via Campesina, ETC Group, Transnational Institute

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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. **Nyéléni 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.

A trade system that prioritizes peasants' rights

Efforts to build a developmental and equitable trading system have occurred in the past. One notable example is the Havana Charter, which aimed to ensure full employment and domestic industrialization in the post-war international trade order. It sought to establish comprehensive rules for trade, investment, services, and business and employment practices. However, under pressure from corporate lobbies and the United States, the charter was abandoned and replaced by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which eventually evolved into the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Another significant initiative is the Global System of Trade Preferences (GSTP), established over three decades ago by the Group of 77 (G77), a coalition of developing countries. The GSTP aims to boost trade among developing nations. In late 2022, Brazil ratified commitments under the GSTP, reigniting international interest in the agreement, which is now just one ratification away from coming into effect. However, these initiatives are often constrained by the prevailing neo-liberal framework, which focuses on promoting trade in agro-industrial products and technology-intensive manufactured goods.

What is needed now is an alternative framework that emphasizes cooperation and collaboration over competition, and solidarity over sanctions. This framework should support rural economies, enable diverse food systems to thrive, and ensure that the rights of peasants, Indigenous peoples, workers in both rural and urban areas and migrants are central to transnational trade.

It's time to change the way we do global trade

Since its creation, social movements, including La Via Campesina, have fought against free trade, particularly the World Trade Organization (WTO), uniting farmers' organizations worldwide. We've mobilized in cities like Seattle, Cancun, Hong Kong, Buenos Aires and Geneva. These struggles have significantly contributed to the WTO's ongoing crisis, and it has remained stagnant since the 2001 Doha agreements.

Despite these victories, free trade continues to harm the global peasantry. The 1995 WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) still authorizes the aggressive trade policies of the US and EU while criminalizing market regulation and support for small producers in many Southern countries. Furthermore, bilateral and regional free trade agreements (FTAs) have proliferated: exacerbating the destruction of market regulation and opening markets to agro-industrial imports (including GM crops); promoting stricter rules on intellectual property (TRIPS+) including enforcement with criminal punishment for infringement; and consolidating corporate control over land by dismantling collective lands ownership. All of which has strengthened transnational companies' control over food systems and deepened the state of poverty that peasant farmers find themselves in.

Since 1995, international agricultural trade dependency has increased, although it should be remembered that this dependence is still very relative, since only 15% of the world's food production goes through international markets. However, when La Via Campesina representatives demand governments to leave the WTO, they are systematically refused, even by those sharing our values. Governments view severing ties with international trade as unthinkable and potentially disastrous.

In June 2022, during the anti-WTO demonstrations in Geneva, social movements highlighted the institution's extreme fragility. Southern countries continue to protest against unjust trade rules, particularly the AoA. This process has been led by India, which defends its market regulation model. Amid intense geopolitical conflict, criticism of the Western-dominated trade order has grown. However, despite our efforts, an agreement, though minimal, was still reached in Geneva to maintain the WTO. WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala seeks to save the institution through proposed reforms. Yet the WTO reform is doomed to fail because of its own inherent contradictions and it will eventually disappear. Social movements must aid its demise by proposing a new framework for international trade that countries can adopt without fear of isolation. This alternative would offer a more equitable system benefiting global populations.

The goal is to create a discussion and negotiation tool for governments, especially those in the South dissatisfied with the WTO's unfair rules, encouraging them to negotiate a new international trade framework. Success requires this process and our proposals to be well understood and supported by peasant and small-scale farmer organizations and their allies. The process must be inclusive with accessible language and intensive internal training.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Others Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) serves as a profound inspiration for this work. This was both an internal process within La Via Campesina to build a tool supported by farmers' organizations globally and a diplomatic process involving institutions (such as the Human Rights Council for UNDROP, UNCTAD, FAO, and others for the international trade framework) and states (like Bolivia's key role in UNDROP). UNDROP took 17 years to be adopted by the UN General Assembly. Similarly, this work on trade will take time. As peasants, patience and endurance are our hallmarks, and we are not afraid of the long haul.

An international trade framework based on food sovereignty is essential. We must build it, step by step from the ground up, convincing governments and UN institutions that the time has come to create international trade by and for the people.

Territorial markets: Food chains building stronger communities

Behind the huge power and visibility of the corporate food chains, closer-to-home markets are actually playing a vital role. Far away from the business spotlights, and with much less support and resources, they feed a large part of the world and have proven to be much more resilient to crises and shocks.

A new report published by IPES-Food reveals that local markets and food chains boost food security and resilience, provide nutritious food for poorer populations, support livelihoods, protect the environment, and strengthen communities. These 'territorial markets', include a wide range of realities in all parts of the world, from public markets to street vendors, cooperatives, urban agriculture, community kitchens, online direct sales and many more.

While agribusiness uses more than two third of agricultural land and resources and keeps pretending to feed the world, data shows that huge volumes of fresh foods are supplied outside of corporate chains, often direct-to-consumer. In sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, small-scale and family farmers produce 80% of the food supply; while global chains account for only roughly 15-20% of total food consumption. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, over 400 markets feed more than 25 million people every day, and 95% of the city's urban poor purchase most of their food from these fresh food markets. In Mexico, open-air and traditional markets account for half of all fruit and vegetables that are sold for retail; in Kenya, Zambia, and Nicaragua, it is over 90%.

In contrast to this we have seen, in recent times, the pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, and escalating climate shocks leading to supply chain chaos, volatile food prices, empty shelves, and a surge in hunger levels. In times of crises, corporate food chains tend to break down, while localized food supply offers a much more adaptable and equitable solution. Additionally, territorial markets support the livelihoods of millions of small-scale producers and nurture strong food cultures and diverse therapeutic traditions in a more sustainable way. They bring people together, opening spaces for popular education and strengthening social fabric. All over the world, interest is now growing in the variety of vibrant food provisioning systems that exist beyond global food chains and corporate control.

However, territorial markets are delivering these benefits against the current of unfavorable policies and economic conditions. Around the world, investment and government support has been skewed towards industrial export agriculture, global trade and large-scale infrastructures. Meanwhile, informal markets and street vendors lack basic services like clean water and sanitation facilities, while facing unsuitable, corporate-oriented health and hygiene rules – as well as the risk of violent closures and evictions. Wholesale markets have often been starved of government investment.

Globally, 70% of smallholders' needs for financing go unmet, and in Africa less than 10% have access to formal credit. Without adequate storage facilities, they are forced to sell at low prices when there is a glut on the market. Institutional purchasers like schools and hospitals lack on-site processing capacity, driving them to larger corporate vendors.

There is clearly an urgent need to invest in territorial markets. There is also huge potential for governments to strengthen and support these markets, making them a cornerstone of food security, vibrant economies, and climate resilience for years to come.

Read more in IPES-Food's new report : Food From Somewhere, <https://ipes-food.org/report/food-from-somewhere>

A brief history of agricultural marketing boards

The dismantling of public marketing boards has been a major feature of the shift in agrarian policy from state-led to market-led development.

Historically, marketing boards have a mixed record. Many marketing boards were extractive in nature, used by governments to squeeze surpluses out of their farming populations and to contain urban wages through price restraints on staple foods. This speaks to the particular geopolitical context in which many of them arose in the 1960s and 70s, during which time development strategies heavily favoured industrialisation. Corrupt and authoritarian regimes have also used marketing boards as a means of consolidating power by placing political appointees on to the board.

Despite some of these flaws, marketing boards performed valuable functions. They were often an important instrument to ensure the distribution of staple foods. Mexico's former grain trading agency, CONASUPO, for example, offered an official purchase price for basic grains, providing a buffer against international market swings and subsidized competition. Marketing boards continue to operate in a number of countries, notably in sub-Saharan Africa, where they handle the majority of the marketing and distribution of export crops.

The criticism that is often levied against marketing boards must also be balanced against the alternatives. State monopolies in agricultural marketing systems have now largely been replaced by the oligopolistic practices of multinational food buyers and retailers. There is thus ample scope to think (again) about the potentials and pitfalls of public marketing boards.

For more; <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/reclaiming-agricultural-investment>



voices from the field

1 Morocco: appropriating food sovereignty for markets!

Ali Aznague, Siyada Network

In the Arab region, agriculture is at the heart of neoliberal policies that grant generous financial subsidies to large investors while marginalizing small farmers. The World Trade Organization, major donor institutions (such as the IMF and World Bank), and comprehensive free trade agreements have exacerbated this situation.

In Morocco, agricultural policy consists of two strategic plans aimed at furthering commercial and export-oriented agriculture: “The Green Plan (2008/2018)” and “The Green Generation (2020/2030).” Ironically, the government maintains the concept of “food sovereignty” but strips it of its political and social content. Similarly, agricultural policies in the Arab Republic of Egypt, such as Article 79 of the 2014 Constitution, outline the principles of

food sovereignty; yet actual practices follow a market logic rather than the emancipatory potential of food sovereignty.

The situation in the Arab region is becoming increasingly difficult and complex due to rising food prices, the resurgence of counter-revolutionary forces, and the Israeli war of extermination against the Palestinian people. Therefore, there is an urgent need to build a militant agricultural movement against hunger and the commodification of food, and to increase pressure to adopt the actual principles of food sovereignty in both words and actions. The principal slogan of the “Siyada Network in the Arab Region” involves establishing partnership relations with countries of the Global South based on cooperation and breaking away from food dependency.

2 India's price support policy

Nandini Jayaram, Karnataka State Farmers Association (KRRS), India

The food shortages India faced in the 1960s led the government to adopt measures to boost agricultural productivity. The Price Support policy began during this time with the establishment of the Agricultural Price Commission in 1965, later reconstituted as the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) in March 1985. This body announces the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for 23 crops, including cereals, pulses, oilseeds, and commercial crops, before each cropping season.

The MSP acts as a safety net for farmers, ensuring they receive a fair price for their crops even if market prices fall below a certain threshold. It also aims to incentivize the production of key crops, preventing shortages of staple food grains. The government procures food grains at MSP for distribution through the Public

Distribution System (PDS), subsidizing food for millions. So, it is indeed a policy that promotes food sovereignty.

Farmers' movements have long demanded that the CACP revise cost calculations by including rentals and interest for owned land and fixed capital assets and adjust for inflation. We also seek a legal guarantee for MSP to prevent purchases below the announced price. Currently, there is no legal backing for MSP, forcing many farmers to sell crops at lower rates due to inadequate procurement mechanisms and market access issues.



voices from the field



3 Mali's agricultural orientation law

Ibrahim Sidibe, CNOP, Mali

Mali regulates markets in a general manner, and for the trade of agricultural products this responsibility has been given to the Agricultural Orientation Law (LOA) and the Agricultural Development Policy (PDA). Enacted in 2006, the LOA covers all economic activities in the agricultural and peri-agricultural sectors, including agriculture, livestock farming, fishing and pisciculture, aquaculture, beekeeping, hunting, forestry, gathering, processing, transportation, trade, distribution, and other agricultural services, as well as their social and environmental functions. It aims to guarantee food sovereignty and to become the engine of the national economy with a view to ensuring the well-being of the populations.

The Agricultural Development Policy (PDA) is based on the accountability of the State, territorial collectivities, agricultural professionals, farmers and civil society. It emphasizes promoting food sovereignty, the reduction of rural poverty, social advancement of women, youth, and men in rural and suburban areas, partnerships and creating common markets within large economic entities at sub-regional, regional, and international levels. Following developments in national and international contexts (such as the Paris Declaration and new modalities of development assistance), Mali and its Technical and Financial Partners have formally committed, since 2008, to a sectoral approach for the agricultural sector. Currently, institutional or organizational sales are not formalized, and we are still in the process of negotiating an appropriate framework.

4 Spain's food chain law

Andoni García, COAG, Spain

The Food Chain Law, passed in Spain in 2013, aims to improve the food chain's functioning by requiring written contracts for producers that include prices. In February 2020, it was amended to mandate that prices paid throughout the food chain, starting with farmers, must legally cover production costs. This change followed protests by agricultural organizations demanding fair prices. In December 2021, the law was further amended to incorporate the EU directive on unfair trading practices and several COAG proposals, achieving significant regulatory elements within the European political framework.

Two key instruments enforce the Food Chain Law: the Food Information and Control Agency (AICA), which collects complaints from farmers and other entities, conducts inspections on price abuse, contract issues, and other abuses, and the Chain Observatory, which conducts price and cost studies across the value chain for each agricultural and livestock production. The 2021 reform also prohibits selling at a loss by large distributors, ensuring products cannot be sold below purchase price. However, the law faces limitations due to competition laws, which prevent collective price negotiation, price fixing, or strict linkage of cost and price studies to contracts. Moreover, the law aims to protect each farmer and livestock breeder individually, not collectively, except for certain exceptions for cooperatives.

5 Territorial markets in Colombia

Juliana Millán, RENAF, Colombia



In RENAF we have created a campaign to identify territorial markets across the country, enhancing their visibility and combined success. The aim is to understand and share the many different ways in which these diverse markets work, their various forms of

association and production, including traditional production that does not need or use agrochemicals.

RENAF members and other regional small producers are empowered by access to this information, which has facilitated collective network responses to crises such as COVID-19, empowering territorial markets and enabling their survival, and enhancing ecological food diversity.

box 3

Rethinking the regulation of agricultural markets for agroecological transition in Europe

The wave of farmers' protests that have swept across Europe in recent months, including in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Greece, Poland, Romania and Lithuania, have set in motion new calls for rethinking Europe's approach to the regulation of agricultural and food markets.

While the particular politics, concerns and demands vary by country, these protests all respond to the extraordinary cost price squeeze farmers are experiencing: in 11 EU countries, prices paid to farmers fell by more than ten percent from 2022 to 2023. The economic precarity experienced by farmers must be set against the backdrop of the longer-term structural crisis in European agriculture.

It is clear that current EU policy frameworks, in particularly the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), has not been able to meet the scale of the current challenge to ensure fair prices and decent incomes for farmers. This was not always the case. The CAP used to deploy a whole panoply of instruments aimed at maintaining relatively high and stable prices for farmers producing foodstuffs deemed strategic, so as to ensure sufficient production to cover the food needs of European populations and reasonable prices for consumers. These tools were nearly all abandoned from 1992 onwards in order to comply with the commitments of the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Agriculture, with market regulation instruments replaced by direct income support for farmers. Over time, this support was made conditional on compliance with an increasing number of standards.

What lessons can be learned from the successes and failures of past policies to regulate agricultural markets, in Europe and elsewhere in the world, in order to rebuild the CAP on the basis of food sovereignty and enable the agroecological transition?

This key question will be the focus of a groundbreaking conference taking place on 'Rethinking the Regulation of Agricultural Markets for Agroecological Transition in Europe' organised by the European Coordination Via Campesina with partners. Scheduled for 3-4 March 2025 in Brussels, the conference will bring together academics, peasants, and small- and medium-sized farmers from across Europe to promote the co-construction of knowledge in service of a new CAP that is fit for purpose.

For more information on the conference, see: <https://www.eurovia.org/events/3-5-march-2025-international-conference-of-researchers-and-farmers-rethinking-the-regulation-of-agricultural-markets-for-agroecological-transition-in-europe/>

voices from the field

6 Canada's supply management system

Cathy Holtlander, National Farmers' Union, Canada

Canada's supply management system provides stability in the dairy, laying hen (egg), broiler chicken, turkey and hatching egg sectors by controlling the amount produced, preventing shortages, and keeping under-priced imports from being dumped into Canada's market. A transparent, cost-of-production pricing formula ensures that farmers receive a fair income. As a result, Canada does not experience wide fluctuations in supply and prices – nor the need for massive government subsidies to farmers.

Farm size remains small to moderate, particularly when compared with these commodities in the USA. Each commodity is governed by farmers elected to their provincial marketing board according to provincial regulations under federal framework legislation. Supply management allows farmers to invest in equipment, training, animal husbandry, genetics and land stewardship for the future while requiring them to produce the right amount of product at the right time and meeting quality standards.

The system also insulates dairy, eggs and poultry from currency exchange fluctuations and other shocks that affect export-oriented and import-dependent sectors of the food and farming system. It also avoids competition for the markets of farmers in other countries who are providing food for their own populations.

Export-dependent dairy nations (USA, Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Argentina) frequently attack the system in order to get access to Canada's market. Within Canada, corporate actors attack the system both to force prices paid to farmers below the cost of production (benefiting food manufacturers), and as a bargaining chip to gain concessions for other sectors in trade negotiations.

Some smaller farmers who direct-market would like to see more flexibility in the system. To improve its ability to face these challenges, supply management boards can improve and expand new-entrant mechanisms to provide more affordable access to production quotas, and encourage alternative production systems that promote renewal, resilience and response to consumer desires for diversity, and develop a 'triple bottom line' approach to cost of production pricing formulae to ensure environmental and social costs are not externalized.