

# 12 Community Food Security

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# Community Food Security



In order to be healthy, people need to eat nutritious food. If we cannot grow, buy, or trade enough food for our families and ourselves, we face hunger, malnutrition, and many other health problems.

**Food security** means that everyone has enough safe and nutritious food all year round to lead an active and healthy life. It also means food is produced and distributed in ways that promote a healthy environment, community self-reliance, and enough good food for every person and community.

Hunger has many causes. Some causes are environmental, such as poor soil, changes in climate, and a lack of water. Hunger from these causes can be addressed through sustainable farming (see Chapter 15) and better use of land and water resources (see Chapter 6, and Chapters 9 to 11).

Other causes of hunger are political, such as unfair food prices, no land to grow food, and corporate control of markets and food systems. Hunger from these and other political causes can be addressed through community organizing.

To produce food, we need land, water, tools, seeds, and knowledge of how to farm. To make sure that everybody has enough food, we need fair distribution, affordable food prices, local markets, and food safety. To achieve these, we must work for a just and sustainable world. Only by working towards a healthy environment and social justice can we guarantee food security for everyone.

## Changes in farming

In Prey Veng, Cambodia, people have grown enough rice to feed themselves for as long as anyone can remember. Along with rice, they traditionally ate wild greens, fish, eels, snakes and other animals from the rice paddy, as well as fruits, nuts, and roots from the forest, and meat from animals they hunt. This diet gave them good health all year round, except in times of war or flooding.

More than 40 years ago, the government began to promote new farming methods to increase production of a few main crops, like rice, for export. These new methods were part of a worldwide change in agriculture, the deceptively named Green Revolution. The Green Revolution encouraged the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers to produce more rice than traditional methods. It also used large irrigation systems and machinery to plant and harvest.

When they started using these new farming methods, the people of Prey Veng were able to produce large amounts of rice to sell. They used the money to improve their houses, build roads, and buy personal goods like clothes and radios. The villagers stopped using animal manure, stopped rotating rice with dry season crops, and stopped using other traditional farming methods as well.

The new methods worked very well for growing large areas of a single crop, and increased the amount of rice they had. But over time, they discovered that their land and the way they ate had changed. Herbicides killed the wild greens the villagers had eaten before. Fish and other wild foods grew scarce. Year by year they spent more money on chemicals and had nothing but rice to eat. Before long, the soil in their fields no longer supported healthy crops, and rice yields began to go down.

Coming together to discuss the growing hunger, the villagers recalled the old ways of farming that used mixed crops, field rotations, and natural fertilizers to grow crops all year round. They saw many advantages to the traditional methods, and decided to change back. They also began trying new methods like planting rice plants closer together and growing different crops in the same field.



There were hungry years while their soil recovered fertility after heavy chemical use, but now the villagers of Prey Veng have more food. They have less rice to sell, but more variety of foods to eat. As Meas Nee, one of the village elders, said, “Because we grow food in the ways of our ancestors, the ancestors are happier, the fields are happier, and we are healthier.”

# What Is Community Food Security?

To understand what problems a community has in getting enough healthy food, look at all the different things that together add up to food security.

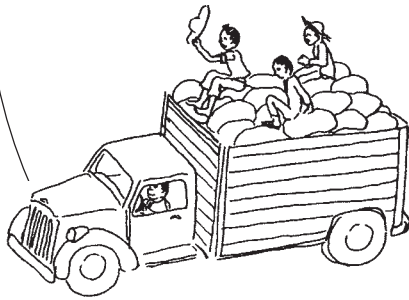
**Food production.** Access to land, seeds, and water; knowledge of how to farm; and finding the right balance between food grown to sell and to eat.



**Money, savings, and credit.** People need money to buy at least some of their food. Food producers need credit for seed and other needs, especially in years when crops fail.



**Good health.** People need to be healthy to absorb the nutrients from food. When people are weak from illnesses caused by unsafe water, or from long-term illnesses like malaria or HIV, they are less able to produce food for themselves and their communities.



**Food transportation and distribution.** A way to get foods to market, and people to markets to buy food.



**Food storage.** Communities often need to store food for 3 or 4 months so it will last through a dry or rainy season, or long times of cold or drought. Food storage must also protect from pests. If rats eat half of your food, you go hungry.

Food contaminated by pesticides, toxic chemicals, germs, or genetically engineered (GE) foods (see Chapter 13), may be available, but will not provide a safe, healthy diet. Also, without a safe cooking space and enough time and fuel to prepare food, people often eat too many processed foods, which can lead to health problems.

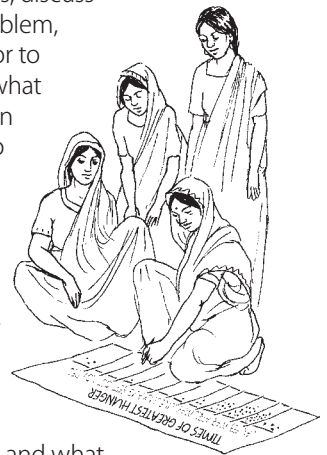
## 10 seeds

This activity can help people agree on what their community's most urgent food security problems are, and then help encourage them to make changes that improve community food security.

**Time:** 2 hours

**Materials:** 10 seeds for each group, colored pens or markers, large poster paper

- 1 Divide into groups of 8 to 10 people. Ask each group to talk about the different things that make up food security, such as food production, food storage, credit, stores and markets that sell healthy food, good land to grow food, and so on. Rural communities that farm, hunt, and fish will have different food security issues than people in cities. Talk about the different things that make up food security where you are. On a piece of large poster paper, write or draw pictures to show the different parts of food security.
- 2 Give each group 10 seeds, and ask them to decide which parts of food security are causing problems in their community, putting more seeds where there are the most problems. For example: Is there hunger for some families because food storage is poor? Or because there is no transportation to get food to the market, or no market where you can buy food? Or because of crop pests, poor soil, or lack of water? This will help the groups identify the weakest parts of their food security. Different people in the community will have different problems. Make sure everyone's problems are heard.
- 3 After each group identifies their most urgent food security problems, discuss what local resources may help. If food production is the biggest problem, are there people with knowledge and skills to start home gardens, or to improve farming practices? If food storage is the biggest problem, what ideas could improve it? If there are no markets, is there a way to open a cooperative store to sell healthy food? Or to buy or share a truck to bring food to the community? Every idea counts.
- 4 After discussing possible solutions, have each group use another large poster paper to draw or write the solutions that seem most practical. Then divide the 10 seeds among these solutions, putting more seeds near the solutions that seem most possible to carry out.
- 5 After each group decides on problems and solutions, come together in a larger group. Using the 10 seeds again, or just voting by raising hands, choose the 1 or 2 most popular solutions. Discuss how to put these solutions into practice. Who needs to be involved, and what resources can the community provide? When can work begin? Set long-term goals, such as "after 2 years, nobody in the community will go hungry." Also set short-term goals, such as pooling community resources each month to open a store in 3 months, or preparing land for planting by the beginning of the growing season.



## Nutrition and food security

When people are sick or **malnourished**, they are less active and less able to produce food, carry water, and maintain a clean home and a healthy environment. But when healthy foods are affordable, produced in a sustainable way, and available in local markets, people have access to a varied and healthy diet.

Not eating well can weaken the body and cause:

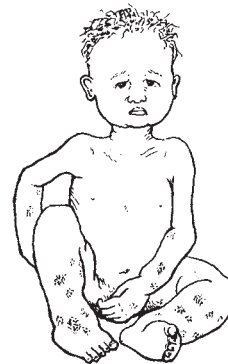
- severe diarrhea, especially in children.
- childhood **measles** to become more dangerous.
- dangerous pregnancies and births, and babies born too small or with disabilities such as slow mental development.
- **anemia**, especially for women.
- **tuberculosis** to be more common, and get worse more quickly.
- **diabetes**, a disease caused when the body cannot use sugar properly, to be more common.
- minor problems like colds to be more frequent, and often more severe, leading to **pneumonia** and **bronchitis**.
- people with HIV or AIDS to get sicker more quickly, and their medicines to not work as well.
- **silicosis**, **asthma**, **heavy metal poisoning**, and other problems caused by contact with toxic chemicals (see Chapters 16 and 20) to be more common and more severe.

Malnourished children grow slowly and learn poorly in school, or are too weak to go to school.

Malnutrition is particularly a problem for young children and must be treated immediately. To learn more about these health problems, and about how good nutrition can prevent them, see a general medical book such as *Where There Is No Doctor*.



**Dry malnutrition:**  
this child is just skin and bones

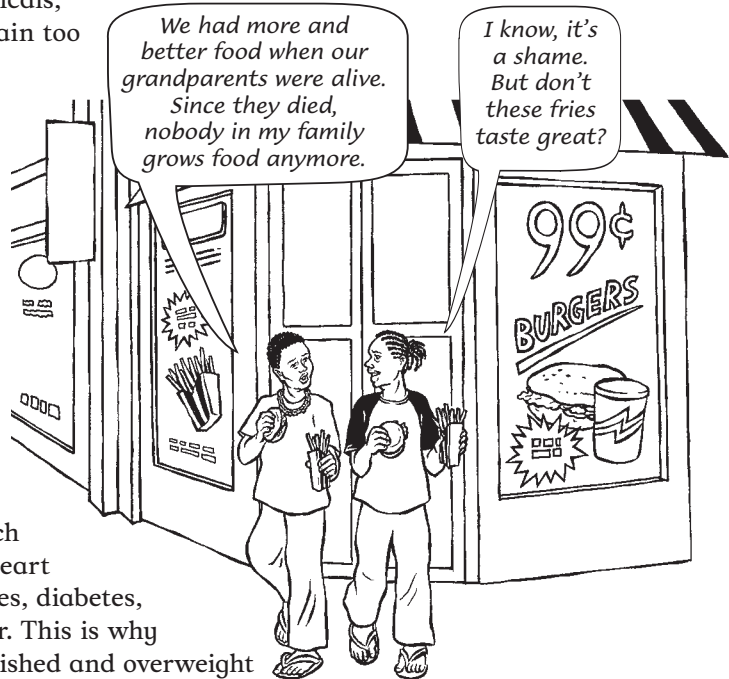


**Wet malnutrition:**  
this child is just skin and bones and water

### Junk food is not healthy

When people do not have land to grow food, live in crowded cities, cannot buy healthy foods in the market, or lose the cultural traditions that help them eat healthy food, they often end up eating “junk” food that contains little nutritional value. Often these foods are refined in ways that remove nutrition, are processed with chemicals, are fried in oil, and contain too much sugar or salt. In small amounts, such foods may not be harmful. But when people eat them regularly instead of more nutritious food, they prevent us from getting the nutrition we need.

As people eat more junk foods, they are more likely to gain too much weight and have health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, gallstones, diabetes, and some kinds of cancer. This is why people can be undernourished and overweight at the same time.



### When farming changes, eating changes

Everywhere in the world, farmers are being driven off their land. Fields that produced food for local communities now grow crops for export. The growing control by corporations of land, seeds, markets, and the ways that food is distributed not only harms farmers, it harms all of us.

Healthy food is becoming harder and harder to find. In many cities, it is easier to buy “junk” foods, alcohol, and illegal drugs than fresh fruits and vegetables. This has led to big changes in our diets in only a few generations. While our grandparents ate mostly foods prepared with fresh ingredients, people now eat too many refined and processed foods lacking nutrition but containing preservatives, flavorings, colorings, and large amounts of sweeteners (sugars and corn syrup), salt, and fats. So, while many of us eat more food than in the past, the foods we eat are less healthy than ever before.



## Changing diets affect Native Americans' health

Only a few generations ago, Native Americans had a healthy diet of foods they hunted, grew, and collected in the wild. When meat, vegetables, and fruit were scarce, they were still able to collect “survival foods” of roots, seeds, tree bark, and small animals.

About 100 years ago, the US government forced Native people to live on reservations and did not allow them to hunt or fish. Rather than providing them with foods they were used to, the government provided mostly white flour, white sugar, and lard (processed animal fat). Today, many Native Americans still eat these government foods. On many reservations, the only food available is fried junk food. Even the people who do not receive food from the government often eat poorly because they have few other choices.

Because they have been forced to eat a lot of foods that are low in nutrition, and because they do not have the foods their bodies need, many Native Americans are overweight and suffer from heart disease and other health problems related to poor diet. Diabetes is now one of the leading causes of death among Native Americans.

This problem has led some Native Americans to begin recovering their culture and good health by bringing back traditional foods. They are planting maize, beans and squash, gathering wild rice, fishing, and raising buffalo for meat. Richard Iron Cloud, a Native American health worker from the Lakota Nation, says, “Change in cultural traditions, lifestyles, and eating habits caused diabetes to increase. The return to our ancestors’ ways of eating can make disease go away again.”



**Farming traditions, like growing different crops together, can ensure good health and protect the land for future generations.**

# Improving Local Food Security

Every government should try to make sure people do not go hungry. National governments can make policies that promote the use of land for family farms, protect against pollution of farmlands, make affordable credit available to farmers, and help farmers solve problems.

Some national governments offer **subsidies** (money to support farmers, food buyers, or both) as a way to improve food security. Kinds of subsidies include **price supports** to help farmers by setting a higher market price for the foods they produce, and **price controls** for food buyers (**consumers**) to make sure that important foods are affordable.

Government support is often misused by giving it to corporations that own large industrial farms or produce and distribute unhealthy foods. When government support is corrupted by pressure from large corporations, the result is often more hunger and malnutrition.

But with or without government support, there are many ways people can improve local food security. From planting a small garden to organizing a farmers' market, changes that improve food security can often bring results quickly and motivate people to do more.



**Local food is healthy, fresher, and supports the local culture and economy.**

## Community food projects

Food security is strongest when food is produced and distributed locally. Locally grown food is fresher and so more nutritious. It builds the local economy as money circulates to farmers and businesses in the area. And it helps build relationships among people, making communities stronger and healthier places to live. Because poor communities often have little land and few food markets, regaining control of food production and distribution is especially important for them.



**Community food programs help keep the culture in agriculture.**

### Ways to grow more food locally

Most of these projects can be started with little land or money, and help communities get more fresh food.

- **Family gardens** add healthy vegetables and fruits to the family meal.
- **School gardens** can provide fresh food for children and help keep children in school by providing nourishment. And they teach children to grow food, making sure this important knowledge stays alive!
- **Community gardens** provide food and places for people to get together, even if they do not own land. Community gardens can also help people learn about food production, develop skills, and start new businesses such as restaurants and markets. Even small gardens can make a big difference to food security.
- **Community supported agriculture** is when farmers sell their food directly to consumers. People pay the farmers before the crops are planted, and then receive fresh fruits, vegetables and other foods each week throughout the harvest season. By making this investment, consumers help farmers stay on the land and in business while getting a dependable supply of nutritious food.
- **Seed saving programs** help make sure that traditional seed supplies are available. A variety of seeds is the basis of sustainable farming and self-sufficient communities (see Chapter 15).

## Making healthy food available at fair prices

The world now produces more than enough food for everyone, but people still go hungry. This is partly because food prices are often higher than people can afford, and healthy food is often not available to the poorest people. Government support is important to make sure prices are fair for both buyers and sellers of food. Some ways people work locally to make sure healthy food is available at fair prices include:

- **Farmers markets** reduce transportation costs and the need for merchants in the middle, so farmers can earn more and consumers pay less. Farmers' markets also let consumers meet and talk with the people who grow their food. This helps farmers learn what consumers need and helps consumers know what farmers do to bring them food.
- **Food cooperatives** are markets partly or entirely owned by the workers and people who buy food there. Food coop members pay part of their food bill by working at the market. Most food coops try to buy and sell locally grown food.
- **Farmers cooperatives** help farmers get better prices for what they grow, and still offer better prices to consumers (see page 313.)



## Safe food storage

Safe food storage is as important as the ability to grow food or have access to food. Drought, storms, flooding, pests, or illness can all leave a family or community with not enough to eat and nothing to sell. Community food storage programs can help overcome these problems. (For information on storing food and protecting it from pests, see page 305. For ways to prevent food from spoiling in the home, see page 375.)

For example, on the Pacific island of Temotu, hurricanes frequently destroy many crops. To improve food security, communities build big, communal pits to store fermented cassava, unripe plantains, bananas, and breadfruit. Everyone contributes to making and filling the pits. When crops are destroyed and people are hungry, they use this stored food.

**Food banks** are places where food is collected and then given away to those in need. Food banks help during a hunger crisis. But because people may come to depend on them, they are not a good solution to long term food security.

When entire regions suffer from hunger, food aid from international agencies can help them get through the crisis. Food aid is a short term solution to food security, but it does not solve the long term need for **food sovereignty** (see page 235).

## Junior Farmer Field School for AIDS orphans

In Mozambique, as in much of Africa, thousands of children are orphaned because their parents died of AIDS. Children orphaned in rural areas are especially at risk for malnutrition, disease, abuse, and sexual exploitation. After the deaths of their parents, many children become heads of the household and have to search for ways to earn money,



a difficult task in rural areas with few job opportunities. Although they are from farm families, many of these children cannot farm because their parents were too ill to pass on their knowledge before dying.

With the help of the United Nations World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization, Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools were begun to care for the growing numbers of AIDS orphans. In these schools, youth between 12 and 18 years old live and work together, and learn about farming, nutrition, medicinal plants, and life skills.

The young people learn traditional and modern farming methods, including field preparation, sowing and transplanting, weeding, irrigation, pest control, use and conservation of resources, processing of food crops, harvesting, and food storage and marketing skills. Dancing and singing help them gain confidence and develop social skills. Theater and discussion groups are used to talk about other important life skills, such as the prevention of HIV and malaria, gender equality, and children's rights.

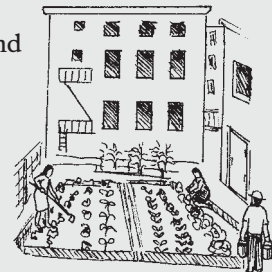
There are now 28 Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools in Mozambique and there are more in Kenya, Namibia, Zambia, Swaziland, and Tanzania. Thousands of orphans have been trained as farmers. After graduating, the children go on to start their own small farms with money earned from selling their crops. One school worker says, "When we started these schools, the children had no future. Most of them wanted to grow up to be truck drivers, because it was the only option they saw. Now they want to be teachers, agronomists, farmers, and engineers."

# Food Security in Cities

Most people in the world now live in or around cities. Many live in refugee camps or other communities with poor housing and sanitation, and little access to jobs, clean water, or healthy food. People have better food security in cities when they have jobs, money, and safe and healthy housing. Then they can buy and eat better food, cook and store food, and even grow their own food in urban gardens.

## The People's Grocery

Like many urban areas in the United States, West Oakland (in California) has more stores that sell alcohol and junk food than ones that offer healthy, fresh food. With stores that do sell healthy food setting prices too high for most people in the community, many people in West Oakland are malnourished or overweight. Problems of alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence make the community a dangerous place to live. Almost 1 of every 4 people in West Oakland depends on emergency food programs.



Seeing this problem, some people got together to bring healthy food to the community at prices people could afford. They began by raising money to buy a truck. They painted the truck in bright colors and put in a stereo system that played popular music. Every week they drove to farmers' markets in other parts of the city and brought back vegetables and fruit. They parked on street corners where people gathered, played music to attract more people, and sold the fresh food at low prices. As they sold food, they talked to people about the importance of a healthy diet.

They called their mobile market The People's Grocery and invited people from the community to join them. Some people decided to start a community garden to grow fresh produce that could be sold by the People's Grocery truck. Young and old people worked together and learned how to grow food. Other people planted gardens of their own. Soon a nearby school and community center also planted gardens. Most of the food from these gardens was sold by the People's Grocery truck.

After success in the community, the People's Grocery asked the city government for land, funds, and advertising. With some government support, they thought their project could feed many more people.

People's Grocery continues to build the local food system and economy, improving food security for everyone in West Oakland. People's Grocery says no one should live without healthy food just because they are poor or live in the city. They say: In order to have food security, we need food justice!

## To build food security in cities, governments must help

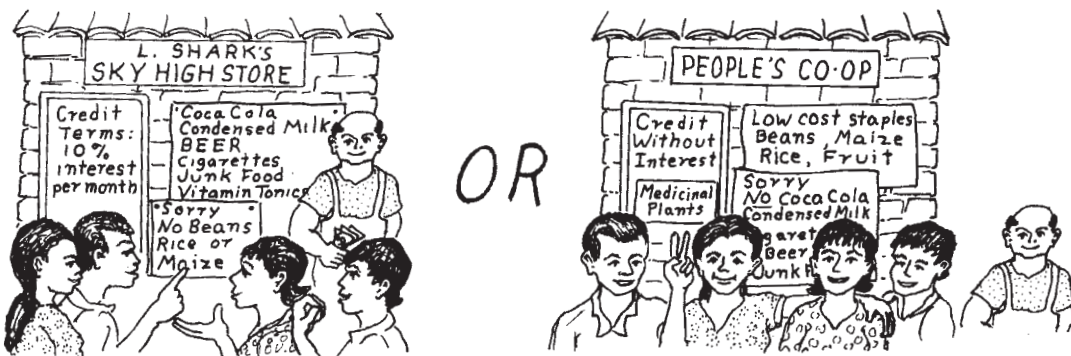
The story of the People's Grocery shows how people in a poor urban community are working to solve their own problems of food security. The program they developed has helped many people, but it has not completely solved the problems of food security.



- Why did people in West Oakland not have healthy food?
- How did the People's Grocery get local people interested in healthy food?
- How could local government become involved in supporting this kind of project?
- What other groups or institutions could the People's Grocery work with to help the project?
- How can you help promote food security in your community?

## Sustainable food policy for cities

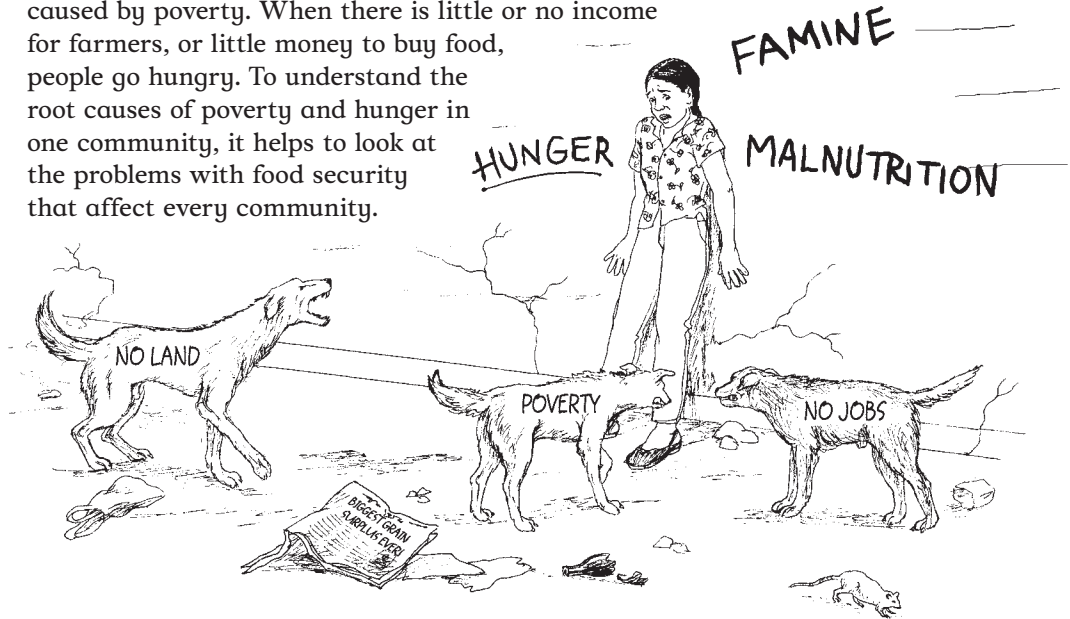
To have lasting food security, all aspects of city life and development must be discussed. People responsible for planning transportation, education, employment, and development of new homes and settlements should think about how people in the city get their food. Providing land for community gardens, transportation to markets, and teaching about food security and nutrition in schools are all ideas local governments can use to help people today, while making sure there will be better food security tomorrow.



**Stores that sell healthy foods at affordable prices support community health.**

## Social and Political Causes of Hunger

Hunger may be caused by many things, such as poor soil, changes in climate, lack of access to water, and so on. But in most communities, hunger is also caused by poverty. When there is little or no income for farmers, or little money to buy food, people go hungry. To understand the root causes of poverty and hunger in one community, it helps to look at the problems with food security that affect every community.



The social and political causes of hunger

### Corporate control harms food security

When food is treated as just another product to be bought and sold instead of something all people need and have a right to, profit from selling food becomes more important than feeding people, and community health suffers. Many people now shop for food in stores owned by large corporations. They buy foods made by large corporations, grown on land owned by large corporations, using seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides produced by large corporations.

Corporate control of all parts of food security forces farmers out of business and off their land. When corporations use land to grow food to sell outside the region, people living and working in those communities must eat food brought in from elsewhere, if they can afford to buy it.

Corporations profit from this food “insecurity” as communities, and whole countries, become dependent on the global market for food. When the market fails to meet people’s food needs, people go hungry and corporations profit further by selling food to governments to be distributed as food aid.

Until people have control of their food security, hunger will be the biggest product of the corporations that control the production and distribution of food.



## Recovering lost seeds to resist drought

In Zimbabwe, farmers once planted many kinds of grains. During the Green Revolution of the 1960s, the government and international agencies brought a new kind of maize for farmers to plant. Farmers liked the hybrid maize because it had large grains, grew quickly, and was easy to sell. The government bought much of their crop, and then resold it to



other countries and to cities in Zimbabwe where food was scarce. Over time, maize became the most common food to eat in Zimbabwe, and most farmers grew it in large quantities.

Then came years of drought. Very little rain fell over the fields of Zimbabwe and other countries in southern Africa. The maize grew poorly, and there was little else to eat. Many families had stored grains for times of hunger, but much of their stores of maize had rotted. This was a surprise, because the millet and sorghum they used to grow had lasted many seasons in storage.

When the rains finally started, they came in huge storms that uprooted crops and washed away precious soil from the dry fields. Hunger grew so severe in Zimbabwe that the government was forced to ask for food aid from the United Nations. Large shipments of maize came in by airplane and were handed out to hungry people across the country. But food aid and the new hybrid seeds could not solve the long term problem of hunger and food security.

The farmers realized they could not bring more rain, but they could change how they farmed to make better use of the rain. Farmers began to collect and plant seeds from small grain crops such as sorghum and millet that had always grown well in Zimbabwe. Farmers planted every kind of seed they could get. If drought destroyed one crop, others would surely survive. Some farmers left their crop stubble to rot in the field after harvest, protecting their soil from washing away during the hard rains. The next season, their soil was still soft and good for planting. Some farmers planted lab lab beans after the grain harvest so something was always growing. They could feed these beans to livestock, and the bean plants also helped to hold and enrich the soil.

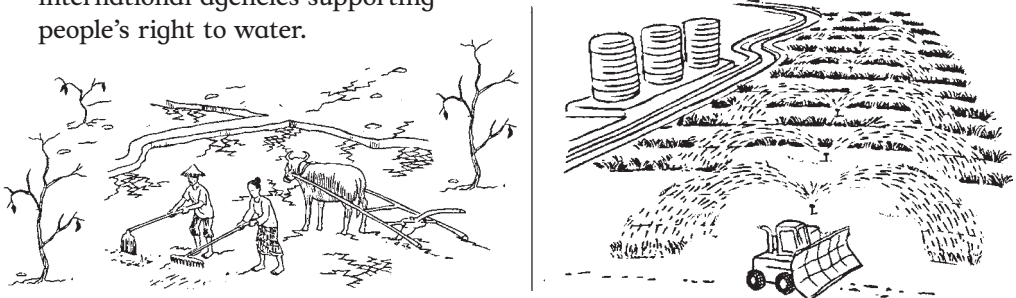
It still rains less in Zimbabwe than it once did. But some farmers there no longer rely on non-native seeds or international food aid, and have become better able to prevent hunger, by growing crops that can survive the drought.

### Green Revolution farming methods

Ever since the “Green Revolution” of the 1960s, corporations and international agencies have claimed they can “feed the world” with “improved seeds,” chemical fertilizers, and pesticides. While they have succeeded in gaining control of farm land, seed supplies, marketing and distribution systems, and so on, they have failed to stop world hunger, and have often made hunger worse.

### Poor access to water

Crops need water to grow. As large farms use more and more water, less and less is available for smallholder farmers. When water is polluted or privately owned, the right to water is threatened (see Chapter 6). There are many ways to manage soils and water to preserve water resources (see Chapters 9 and 15), but these methods must be protected and promoted by governments and international agencies supporting people’s right to water.



### Loss of land

When most of the land is owned by a few people or corporations, this causes many food problems. Many smallholder farmers are forced to leave their land and migrate to the cities, or work on plantations or in factories. Because they no longer have land to grow their own food, or money to buy healthy food, they become victims of hunger and malnutrition.

Usually larger farms and corporations will plant just one crop, employ fewer people, use more machinery, more chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, and sell produce far from where it is grown, often sending it to other countries. This creates less variety of food, poorer nutrition, less income for farm workers, more environmental damage, and less food available locally. This also harms local cultures because people can no longer maintain their traditions of growing food and taking care of the land.

### Poor access to credit and markets

Because farming depends on the weather and on market prices, farmers sometimes need to borrow money until harvest time or until the market improves. Banks often refuse to lend money to smallholder farmers while lending money to larger, more powerful farms. This causes smallholder farmers and their families and communities to go hungry. In many cases, it also forces them to give up their land.

### Migration

When people are forced off their land, they may also lose their knowledge of how to produce food. If young people leave for the city before learning to farm, they will never be able to teach their own children how to farm and the family's loss of land will be permanent.

### Epidemic diseases

As diseases like HIV and AIDS, TB, and malaria kill millions of people worldwide, hunger and malnutrition increase. Families and communities are losing whole generations of people, usually the people who would be most active growing food. Food production goes down as farmers die, and their knowledge of how to grow food dies with them. Preventing and treating these diseases not only prevents the hunger and malnutrition that go with them, but is important for the entire community's food security.

### Lack of knowledge

In many places, people have lost traditional knowledge of how to produce food. And because of rapidly changing conditions, such as overcrowded communities, less fertile land, and changing weather, old methods often no longer work. When people do not know how to produce food, hunger and a lack of food security is the result. One solution to this problem is to maintain, pass on, and improve knowledge through farmer field schools, farmer to farmer education programs, and agricultural extension services (see page 316, and Resources).



**Hunger is caused by a lack of food. A lack of food is often caused by a lack of justice.**

# Food Sovereignty is a Human Right

All people have the right to food that is safe, healthy, and culturally acceptable to them. **Food sovereignty** is the right to determine our own food systems, and make sure every community has food security.

## Vía Campesina promotes people's control of food

Many smallholder farmers do not earn fair prices for their crops. One reason for this is that the rules of international trade benefit rich nations and large landholders. Often, farmers cannot get fair prices, even in local markets, because imported foods are cheaper. This forces farmers to sell at lower prices and drives them deeper into debt, poverty, and hunger.

In response to this problem, farmers in many countries joined together to form a movement called *Vía Campesina* ('The Peasant Way' in Spanish). *Vía Campesina* brings many farmer organizations together to strengthen farmers' ability to earn fair prices, to preserve land and water resources, and to have control over how food is produced and distributed. For *Vía Campesina*, food security can be achieved only through food sovereignty — when farmers and peasants have the right to decide what foods they produce and how much to sell them for, and when consumers have the right to decide what they consume and who they buy it from.

In some places, *Vía Campesina* pressures politicians and corporations to respond to the demands of local farmers' unions. In other places they support landless farmers working to reclaim unused farmlands. They also help build local institutions that distribute food fairly to those most in need.

When a huge earthquake and tsunami (a massive tidal wave) struck Indonesia in 2005, most of the people affected by the disaster were farmers and fishers. *Vía Campesina* provided aid, but rather than simply bringing food and other materials from outside the area, they worked with local organizations to buy food, tools, and other materials from local small producers. They raised important issues such as the origin of food aid (whether it was local or imported), the way farm reconstruction would happen (whether it promoted family based production or large food corporations), and how to strengthen local organizations (not make them dependent on aid).

Most of the money *Vía Campesina* raised was used for long-term reconstruction, such as rebuilding houses and fishing boats, making new tools for farmers and fishers, and restoring farm lands to production. By focusing on the self-reliance of the people affected by the disaster, *Vía Campesina* promoted not just short-term recovery, but long-term food sovereignty.