

Sustainable Peasant's Agriculture

Evenstad Declaration : Seven measures for strengthening peasant family farming!

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(Evenstad, 4 March 2014) The peasants gathered together in Norway for the Annual General Assembly of European Coordination Via Campesina and their allies present Seven measures for strengthening peasant family farming, now!

At present, peasant family farming is and remains the most widespread model to produce food in Europe and the world.

For several decades now European farmers have faced a “sink or swim” situation. Costly investments and equipment and increasing farm size have dragged producers into a never-ending downward spiral. Forced “modernisation” is no longer a way to gain access to an improved way of life and comfort, but an end in itself and an obligation. Debts weigh heavily on all, and the most vulnerable are left by the wayside. Food has become just another commodity, and peasants just producers of raw materials. All control has been wrested from their grasp.

In a number of countries, and in a number of ways, peasants have fought against this unbridled change to preserve the values and meaning of their work. They do not see their animals as machines, they develop agro-ecological systems, foster partnerships with consumers and promote healthy, high-quality food.

Many are members of the organisations which make up European Coordination Via Campesina, part of our political agenda to build an alternative food system founded on food sovereignty.

The 2007-2008 food crisis once again highlighted the strategic importance of food. Politicians have begun to recognise the need to preserve all forms of agriculture – and not just the industrial model – to ensure global food security.

At the same time, the crisis has made investment in the agricultural sector a more attractive prospect and increased land grabbing, large-scale monocultures and the development of industrial livestock farming, to the detriment of small-scale farmers.

In the European Union, negotiations on a new CAP are drawing to a close, but it is very similar to the old system which led to the disappearance of 20% of European farmers and 3 million jobs between 2003 and 2010. Refusing to provide farmers with a decent living thanks to fair prices ensured through the public regulation of markets, the EU is maintaining the injustice of a system based on per-hectare payments.

In 2014, the International Year of Family Farming decreed by the UN celebrates smallholders and family farming. However, this is in sharp contrast with public policies being decided on at global level, subject to the vagaries of the markets and financial speculation, which foster economic wars and competition. These policies do not recognise the fundamental role played by the social model of peasant production in terms of food, employment and respect for nature.

The peasants of European Coordination Via Campesina call upon all national and regional governments as well as the European institutions to take the following seven measures:

- 1) To protect the existence and activity of smallholders who are particularly vulnerable and the first people forced to migrate within Europe, and to protect agricultural labourers, shepherds, artisanal fishermen, etc., European States and the EU must support the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council on the Rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.
- 2) By nature, so-called “free” trade agreements only benefit transnational companies, to the detriment of small-scale farmers. They are set up in an opaque and non-democratic manner, and have a negative effect on food standards, not to mention on the countries of the Global South. Therefore, the EU should cease negotiations on all new free trade agreements, in particular the transatlantic free trade agreement between the EU and the USA (TTIP), suspend the application of agreements already signed, and renegotiate other agreements to ensure they benefit populations.
- 3) Regarding the Common Agricultural Policy, the final arbitrations on the CAP and national and regional adaptations must strive to help smallholders. In particular, this can be achieved through the maximum coupling of payments to production, removing minimum levels in terms of surface area or investment for access to subsidies (in particular for installation aid), while implementing upper limits to redistribute assistance towards peasant farming. Cross-compliance must be adapted to avoid illogical and discriminatory measures for peasant crop and livestock farming.
- 4) In national laws, just as in EU regulations, the inalienable rights of farmers to produce, reproduce, exchange and sell their seeds, safeguarding cultivated biodiversity and the autonomy of farmers, must be recognised. GM crops in all forms must be prohibited in all areas.
- 5) To promote high-quality local production in short food supply chains accessible to all, including the most vulnerable in Europe, all States are asked to develop health safety measures for processing plants and points of distribution to customers which are specific for small volumes. Local purchases from smallholders through public procurement should also be promoted.
- 6) Supporting peasants in setting up must be a priority to ensure the renewal of farmers and guarantee the vitality of rural areas. We must implement land policies, with a European directive based on the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests issued by the UN Food Security Committee, which favour young farmers and farming families, not only for acquiring land, but also with secured leases for those who work the land, preventing land grabbing and the expansion of industrial crop and livestock mega farms. The financing of public services and development of rural areas are essential to make working in the countryside an attractive prospect.
- 7) Particular attention must be paid to ensuring the strict observance of equal rights for women with regards to access to land, financing, and all the resources required for peasant work.

To ensure society is founded on values of solidarity, the environment is preserved and good-quality food is available, Europe needs all its peasants!

In this International Year of Family Farming, the struggle lies ahead!

P.S.

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