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CLIMATE CHANGE, FOOD SECURITY, AND AGROBIODIVERSITY: TOWARD A JUST, RESILIENT, AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM

Carmen G. Gonzalez*

The global food system is in a state of profound crisis. Decades of misguided aid, trade, and production policies have generated record levels of world hunger despite bountiful harvests and soaring profits for the transnational corporations that dominate the global food supply.¹ The rapid expansion of industrial agriculture has produced an unprecedented loss of plant genetic diversity,² making the world’s food supply dangerously vulnerable to wide-spread crop failure akin to that of the Irish potato famine.³ In addition, climate change threatens to wreak havoc on food production by increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, depressing agricultural yields, reducing the productivity of the world’s fisheries, and placing additional pressure on scarce water resources.⁴

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3. See FOWLER & MOONEY, supra note 2, at 43-45, 82-83.

This Article examines the underlying causes of the global food crisis and recommends specific measures to address the distinct but related problems of food insecurity, loss of genetic resources, and climate change. Part I introduces the seldom-discussed crisis of agrobiodiversity, and explains the threats that genetic uniformity poses to the world’s food supply. Part II explores the historic and current causes of widespread food insecurity, and analyzes the common roots of food insecurity and loss of agrobiodiversity. Part III examines the threat posed by climate change to global agricultural production and the role of agriculture in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Part IV argues that small-scale sustainable agriculture has the potential to address the interrelated climate, food and agrobiodiversity crises, and suggests specific measures that the international community might take through law and regulation to promote socially just and environmentally sustainable agricultural production.

The Article concludes that the root cause of the global food crisis is corporate domination of the food supply and the systemic destruction of local food systems that are healthy, ecologically sustainable, and socially just. As the devastating social and environmental consequences of industrial agriculture become increasingly apparent, social movements in the Global North and the Global South are calling for sustainable food systems that minimize greenhouse gas emissions, rely on local inputs, strengthen rural economies, and connect farmers and consumers.\(^5\) By threatening widespread destruction of the natural resources necessary for food production, the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis may spark a broad-based poverty crisis.

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political movement to redirect resources toward food production systems that sequester carbon, promote agrobiodiversity, and support the livelihoods of small farmers.

I. THE CRISIS OF AGROBIODIVERSITY

While the reality of climate change has finally penetrated the popular psyche, another environmental crisis – the dramatic loss of agrobiodiversity – silently threatens the world’s food supply.\(^6\) Agrobiodiversity consists of the biological resources that are important for food production, including the diverse varieties of animals, plants, and micro-organisms that sustain the functioning of agro-ecosystems.\(^7\) This Article focuses on one aspect of agrobiodiversity – the planet’s food crop diversity.

Over the last fifty years, much of the world’s agriculture has transitioned into industrial agriculture, which requires greater inputs of water, synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, and fossil fuel-based energy than traditional peasant agriculture.\(^8\) This model of agricultural production has triggered a wide range of environmental problems, including deforestation, increased reliance on dwindling stocks of fossil fuels, soil degradation, agrochemical contamination of water supplies, depletion of aquifers, and the release of greenhouse

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6. See Fowler & Mooney, supra note 2, at ix.
7. Building on Gender, supra note 2, at 1-2 (defining agrobiodiversity as: [t]he variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms that are used directly or indirectly for food and agriculture, including crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries. It comprises the diversity of genetic resources (varieties, breeds) and species used for food, fodder, fiber, fuel and pharmaceuticals. It also includes the diversity of non-harvested species that support production (soil micro-organisms, predators, pollinators), and those in the wider environment that support agro-ecosystems (agricultural, pastoral, forest, and aquatic) as well as the diversity of the agro-ecosystems.) Id. at 2 (Box 2).
gases. The impact on genetic diversity, however, has been particularly devastating.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 75% of the world’s food crop diversity was lost in the twentieth century as farmers abandoned local varieties in favor of genetically uniform high-yielding crops. Although thousands of crops have been cultivated since the dawn of agriculture, twelve crops currently supply 80% of the world’s plant-based dietary energy. Just four crops – rice, wheat, potato, and maize – supply nearly 60% of plant-derived calories and protein.

In addition to relying on a small number of crops, the world’s food supply also relies on an alarmingly narrow genetic base. Genetically uniform, high-yielding varieties have supplanted traditional varieties for 70% of the world’s maize; 50% of the wheat in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; and 75% of Asian rice. While Indian farmers cultivated 30,000 wild varieties of rice in 1950, only fifty varieties are projected to remain by 2015.

10. See FOWLER & MOONEY, supra note 2, at ix (describing the loss of genetic diversity in agriculture as a “devastating time bomb . . . . leading us to a rendezvous with extinction”).
12. FOWLER & MOONEY, supra note 2, at 86.
13. First Fruits, supra note 11.
14. Id.
15. Miguel A. Altieri & Paul Rogé, The Ecological Role and Enhancement of Biodiversity in Agriculture, in AGRICULTURE, BIODIVERSITY AND MARKETS: LIVELIHOODS AND AGROECOLOGY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE 15, 17 (Stewart Lockie & David Carpenter, eds., 2010) (discussing the “genetic homogeneity that exists within some of the most commonly planted crops”).
17. Id.
18. Id.
19. Id.
The dangers posed by the genetic uniformity of the world's food crops can best be illustrated by the Irish potato famine of the 1840s. Native to the Andes, the potato was introduced into Spain in 1570 and into England and Ireland in approximately 1590. For over two centuries, all of the potatoes cultivated in Europe descended from these two introductions. The Irish potato famine was caused by a fungus known as *phytophthora infestans*. Due to the genetic uniformity of the Irish potato crop, a single infestation was sufficient to produce widespread devastation. The Irish potato famine lasted for five years, and resulted in the death of as many as 2,000,000 people and the migration to the United States of a comparable number. Eventually, potato varieties resistant to *phytophthora infestans* were discovered among the thousands of distinct potato varieties in the Andes and in Mexico, thus enabling potato cultivation to recover in Ireland. If some of these resistant potato varieties had originally been planted in Ireland along with the more vulnerable varieties, then the Irish potato famine might have been averted.

The Irish potato famine is a tragic example of the vulnerability of genetically uniform crops to pests and disease. Unable to rely on their own natural defenses, genetically uniform crops typically require significant agrochemical inputs to survive. However, pesticides kill beneficial organisms as well as target pests, and typically lead to the resurgence of pests, outbreaks of new pests, and pesticide resistance. In contrast, genetically diverse crops are more resilient
than genetically uniform monocultures because some varieties are
able to resist pests, disease, and adverse weather conditions to which
other varieties might succumb.\textsuperscript{30} Indeed, cultivating different crops
and different crop varieties has historically served as an insurance
policy for farmers — a means of protecting their livelihoods in the
face of climate variations, pathogen infestations, price fluctuations,
and socio-political disruptions.\textsuperscript{31}

Regrettably, agrobiodiversity is under threat world wide – along
with the local knowledge and skills required to cultivate and utilize
different wild and harvested plant species and varieties.\textsuperscript{32} The main
reasons for this global crisis are the rapid expansion of industrial
agriculture, the Green Revolution, the globalization of the food
system and consequent marginalization of small-scale farmers, and
the replacement of local crop varieties by “improved” non-native
varieties.\textsuperscript{33} Local cultivation practices often disappear due to the
intrusion of foreign technology that promises farmers short-term
gains in the form of higher yields.\textsuperscript{34} High-yielding crop varieties may
thrive under favorable weather conditions, but they can also fail
spectacularly under adverse conditions.\textsuperscript{35} It is therefore vitally
important to protect and preserve the skills, customs, traditions, and

\textsuperscript{30} See Fowler & Mooney, supra note 2, at 47.
\textsuperscript{31} Id. at 3.
\textsuperscript{32} Id. at 4-5. The Green Revolution was a public sector initiative designed to
combat world hunger by breeding and distributing new varieties of staple crops
(primarily cereals) that produced high yields in response to the application of
fertilizer and irrigation. While the Green Revolution was extremely successful from
the standpoint of food production, it accelerated the loss of traditional crops and
crop varieties. See Fowler & Mooney, supra note 2, at 56-60. By the 1990s,
Green Revolution crop varieties comprised approximately 70% of the world’s
maize, over half of the wheat produced in Asia and Latin America, and nearly
75% of the rice cultivated in Asia. Frances Moore Lappe et al., World Hunger:

\textsuperscript{33} Building on Gender, supra note 2, at 10 (describing how higher yielding
sorghum varieties were introduced in Ethiopia to “increase food security and
income” for rural farmers).
\textsuperscript{34} Id. (describing how the higher yielding sorghum varieties were
successful when weather conditions were favorable, but failed in drought
conditions).
technologies of small farmers as these skills form one component of an integrated system of agricultural knowledge.\(^{36}\)

The diverse plant varieties under the stewardship of the world’s small farmers are vital to global food security, not only for their ability to ward off catastrophic crop failure, but also as a source of the raw germplasm used by plant breeders to develop crops that can withstand environmental shocks, including those that may be associated with climate change.\(^{37}\) Historically, plant breeders have used the diverse characteristics of traditional crops to select particular traits, such as drought resistance, tolerance for heat and cold, and resistance to specific pests and diseases.\(^{38}\) Because traditional crops have survived in farmers’ fields for thousands of years amidst pests and diseases without chemical inputs, they usually possess a wealth of valuable characteristics.\(^{39}\) If traditional varieties cannot supply the needed traits, plant breeders typically turn to “wild relatives” – wild or weedy plants closely related to cultivated crops.\(^{40}\) Plant breeders have used wild relatives to breed many cultivated crops, including sugarcane, strawberries, black pepper, peanuts, potatoes, tomatoes, tobacco, maize, wheat, and cacao.\(^{41}\) Sadly, wild relatives are increasingly at risk as a consequence of the loss, degradation and fragmentation of natural habitats, and the continuing industrialization of agriculture.\(^{42}\)

Genetic diversity also has value beyond the ability to fight pests and disease. As weather patterns become less predictable and agricultural yields decline, plants that currently have little or no economic value may become very important as sources of food and

\(^{36}\) See id.; Stewart Lockie & David Carpenter, Agriculture, Biodiversity and Markets, in AGRICULTURE, BIODIVERSITY AND MARKETS: LIVELIHOODS AND AGROECOLOGY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE, supra note 15, at 5.


\(^{39}\) See Fowler & Mooney, supra note 2, at 42-43, 60.

\(^{40}\) Id. at 50; United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], The Environmental Food Crisis: The Environment’s Role in Averting Future Food Crises 74 (Christian Nellemann et al. eds., 2009) [hereinafter UNEP, The Environmental Food Crisis].

\(^{41}\) Fowler & Mooney, supra note 2, at 51-52.

\(^{42}\) See UNEP, The Environmental Food Crisis, supra note 40, at 74.
Although the planet contains at least 75,000 edible plants, humans have historically consumed only 3,000 plant species, only 150 of which have been cultivated on a large scale. Similarly, while one fourth of all medicines and pharmaceuticals are derived from plants, animals, and microorganisms (including analgesics, tranquilizers, contraceptives, diuretics, and cancer-fighting compounds), only 3% of the world’s flowering plant species have been tested for medicinal properties. Regrettably, the dangerous decline in the genetic diversity of the world’s cultivated crops is taking place at a time when the planet is losing wild plant and animal species at a rate 100 to 1,000 times the historical average – a rate of extinction unparalleled since the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction sixty-five million years ago that resulted in the disappearance of dinosaurs.

In sum, the expansion of industrial agriculture has narrowed the genetic base of the world’s food supply, and has increased the likelihood of catastrophic crop failure in the event of drought, heavy rains, and outbreaks of pest and disease. In addition, the loss of genetic resources and the loss of local knowledge about traditional agricultural practices compromise the ability of farmers and plant breeders to develop plants that will resist future environmental shocks, including those associated with climate change. All of this is transpiring at a time of unprecedented extinction of wild plants and animals. Because the agrobiodiversity crisis and global food insecurity have similar roots, the following section examines the common causes underlying these problems.


45. Id. at 263.

46. See PRUGH, supra note 8, at 65.


48. See supra notes 6-7.
II. GLOBAL FOOD INSECURITY AND LOSS OF AGRIBIODIVERSITY: 
ROOT CAUSES

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that in 2009 1.02 billion people were chronically malnourished worldwide — a figure that represents one sixth of the world’s population.\(^49\) At least one billion of the world’s malnourished people reside in the Global South.\(^50\) The majority are peasants who produce at least seventy percent of the world’s food and whose survival depends on marketing their agricultural output.\(^51\) These small farmers are also the custodians of the genetically diverse crop varieties that may prove vital to the sustainability of the global food system.\(^52\)

Food insecurity is a function of poverty rather than food scarcity.\(^53\) Global food production has outstripped global population growth for several decades,\(^54\) and there is currently more than enough food to eliminate world hunger.\(^55\) People go hungry because they are too
poor to grow or purchase food. Nations are food insecure because they lack the ability to produce or purchase sufficient food to satisfy domestic nutritional needs.

The root cause of food insecurity and loss of agrobiodiversity is a corporate-dominated food production and distribution system that marginalizes small farmers and places developing countries at a structural disadvantage in world agricultural trade. This food production and distribution system was imposed on the Global South in several successive stages outlined below.

A. The Colonial Legacy

Food insecurity in the Global South has its origins in colonialism. As a consequence of the colonial division of labor, most developing countries entered the world economy as producers of raw materials and consumers of manufactured products. Agricultural export specialization is economically disadvantageous due to the volatility of world market agricultural prices, to the declining terms of trade for agricultural commodities in relation to manufactured goods, and to the vulnerability of agricultural production to vicissitudes of weather and climate. The genetic uniformity of export crops also makes them highly vulnerable to periodic crop failure due to pests and disease.


The least food-secure states are those that combine inadequate domestic food production with heavy reliance upon one or two agricultural export commodities for a significant portion of foreign exchange earnings. Poor harvests or sudden declines in world market prices for exports can deprive these countries of the foreign exchange earnings necessary to purchase essential foodstuffs. Likewise, increases in the world market price of imports can make it difficult to obtain the food necessary to satisfy domestic nutritional needs. Id.


59. Id.

60. See Gonzalez, supra note 57, at 422, 430.

61. See id. at 438.
Not surprisingly, food insecurity is concentrated in developing countries that dedicate high quality agricultural lands to export production, do not produce enough food for domestic consumption, and rely on a small number of agricultural exports to earn the foreign exchange with which to import food. Adverse weather and market volatility depresses export earnings and creates chronic food shortages or famines. To guarantee a reliable food supply, developing countries must invest in the domestic agricultural sector, protect the livelihoods of small farmers, and develop a more diversified economic base capable of generating stable and robust revenue streams to finance the importation of food and other goods not produced domestically.

The trade and aid policies of industrialized countries in the aftermath of World War II undermined food security in the Global South by promoting dependence on imported food, devastating the livelihoods of small farmers, and depriving developing countries of the revenues with which to finance economic diversification. In the post-war period, agricultural producers in the United States and Western Europe, buttressed by state price supports and generous agricultural subsidies, disposed of surplus agricultural production in developing countries as food aid or dumped the food on the market at low prices. This practice depressed agricultural commodity prices, discouraged food production in the Global South, impoverished small farmers, and generated dependence on cheap, imported food. At the same time, the tariffs and other import barriers maintained by the United States and other industrialized countries diminished the export

62. Id. at 423-35, 465-67. Among the most vulnerable are the forty-three developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean that generate over half of their export revenues from agricultural exports and rely on one agricultural commodity for over twenty percent of these revenues. See THE STATE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN THE WORLD, supra note 49, at 17.


64. See Gonzalez, The Global Food Crisis, supra note 37, 474-75.

65. HOLT-GIMENEZ & PATEL, supra note 1, at 24; Gonzalez, Trade Liberalization, supra note 57, at 435-36.

66. Gonzalez, Trade Liberalization, supra note 57, at 436.
earnings available to developing countries to finance economic diversification and industrialization.\textsuperscript{67}

The 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade ("GATT") did little to restrict agricultural subsidies and import barriers of the Global North.\textsuperscript{68} Various GATT exemptions permitted industrialized countries to heavily subsidize domestic agricultural exporters and to restrict the importation of agricultural products from the Global South.\textsuperscript{69} Although the GATT was amended several times in response to developing country demands for greater access to markets in the Global North,\textsuperscript{70} these amendments were typically drafted in non-binding language and often excluded agricultural products, textiles, and clothing— the major export products of developing countries.\textsuperscript{71} Thus, notwithstanding the GATT, trade barriers in the Global North continued to deprive developing countries of the export revenues needed to finance industrialization while Northern agricultural subsidies depressed world market agricultural commodity prices, harmed small farmers, and increased dependence food imports.\textsuperscript{72}

\textbf{B. The Green Revolution}

The next major event in the history of the global food system was the Green Revolution, which sought to reduce world hunger by increasing agricultural yields.\textsuperscript{73} With funding from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, international crop breeding institutions developed and disseminated new varieties of rice, wheat, and maize.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} See Carmen G. Gonzalez, \textit{Institutionalizing Inequality: The WTO Agreement on Agriculture, Food Security, and Developing Countries}, 27 Colum. J. Envtl. L. 433, 440-46 (2002).
\item \textsuperscript{70} Ismail, supra note 69, at 65-67.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Id. at 66, 71; Lee, supra note 69, at 37.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Gonzalez, \textit{Trade Liberalization}, supra note 57, at 456-57.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Conway, \textit{supra} note 38, at 44; Keith Griffin, \textit{Alternative Strategies for Economic Development} 144 (1989).
\end{itemize}
that produced higher yields than traditional varieties in response to synthetic fertilizers and controlled irrigation.\textsuperscript{74}

While the Green Revolution dramatically increased global food production, it also perpetuated food insecurity in the Global South by increasing poverty and inequality.\textsuperscript{75} The Green Revolution generally favored wealthy farmers because poor farmers lacked the resources to purchase the synthetic fertilizers, chemical pesticides, and irrigation equipment required to produce high yields.\textsuperscript{76} Furthermore, by increasing global food production, the Green Revolution caused agricultural commodity prices to plummet, thereby impoverishing small farmers.\textsuperscript{77} As one commentator observed, the Green Revolution “led in India, Thailand, Mexico and elsewhere to the concentration of land among those with the most capital, and to a veritable army of landless peasants.”\textsuperscript{78} A study reviewing over 300 published reports on the Green Revolution spanning a thirty-year period confirmed this assessment, concluding that the Green Revolution generally increased rural inequality.\textsuperscript{79}

The Green Revolution’s most significant environmental impact was a staggering worldwide loss of genetic diversity.\textsuperscript{80} The Green Revolution displaced ecologically sustainable biodiverse agricultural practices, and promoted reliance on genetically uniform seeds, chemical fertilizers, and synthetic pesticides manufactured by transnational corporations based in the industrialized world.\textsuperscript{81} The consequences of this dramatic shift to industrial agriculture included a loss of crop genetic diversity, heightened vulnerability to pests and

\textsuperscript{74} CONWAY, supra note 38, at 51-55.

\textsuperscript{75} FOWLER & MOONEY, supra note 2, at 58-59; KEITH GRIFFIN, THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AGRARIAN CHANGE: AN ESSAY ON THE GREEN REVOLUTION 51 (1974) (describing how Green Revolution technologies favored landlords, strengthening the landlord class and increasing inequities); Young, supra note 58, at 72.

\textsuperscript{76} Gonzalez, Trade Liberalization, supra note 57, at 442-43.

\textsuperscript{77} See id.; see also GRIFFIN, supra note 73, at 158.


\textsuperscript{80} See FOWLER & MOONEY, supra note 2, at 54-79 (describing the Green Revolution and its impact on agrobiodiversity).

\textsuperscript{81} Id. at 75-76.
disease, loss of soil fertility, pollution of water supplies by pesticides and fertilizers from agricultural runoff, depletion of aquifers for irrigation, loss of traditional food crops, loss of ecosystem biodiversity, and increased pesticide-related illness.\textsuperscript{82}

In sum, the Green Revolution transformed peasant-based agricultural systems into large-scale commercial monocultures, and thereby accelerated the worldwide loss of genetic diversity. The Green Revolution also increased poverty and inequality – the underlying causes of food insecurity.\textsuperscript{83}

\textit{C. Structural Adjustment and the WTO}

The debt crisis of the 1980’s initiated the final stage in the transformation of Southern agriculture. When the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) raised oil prices in the early 1970s, developing countries borrowed money from Northern commercial banks to pay for imported fuel and petroleum-based agricultural inputs.\textsuperscript{84} When subsequent oil price shocks in 1979-80 coincided with soaring interest rates and declining prices for agricultural commodities, many debtor nations in the Global South were unable to repay their loans.\textsuperscript{85} In exchange for new loans or for the restructuring of existing debt, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund imposed a standard recipe of free market reforms (known as “structural adjustment”) on these indebted nations that included elimination of subsidies to the agricultural sector, opening up their markets to foreign competition by reducing tariffs and other trade barriers, and promoting agricultural exports in order to service the foreign debt.\textsuperscript{86} These policies bankrupted small farmers by depriving them of state support and by placing them in direct competition with highly subsidized U.S. and EU agricultural producers.\textsuperscript{87} As domestic food production declined, much of the

\textsuperscript{82} CONWAY, supra note 38, at 48, 88, 91; FOWLER & MOONEY, supra note 2, at 63-83; PRETTY, REGENERATING AGRICULTURE, supra note 9, at 69-72.

\textsuperscript{83} See generally Freebairn, supra note 79.


\textsuperscript{85} Gonzalez, The Global Food Crisis, supra note 37, at 468-69.

\textsuperscript{86} Id.

\textsuperscript{87} Gonzalez, Markets, Monocultures, and Malnutrition, supra note 67, at 364-65.
Global South became dependent on food imports. Africa, for example, was a net food exporter during the 1960s. As a consequence of declining agricultural investment and the influx of cheap food imports, Africa currently imports twenty-five percent of its food and suffers from recurrent famines and food emergencies. Ironically, the export-oriented policies favored by the World Bank and the IMF caused the foreign exchange earnings of many developing countries to decline as world markets were glutted with competing agricultural exports from a variety of countries in the Global South. Because wealthy countries were not required to reduce subsidies or eliminate import barriers, structural adjustment introduced a double standard in international agricultural trade that continues to the present day: open markets for the poor and protectionism for the wealthy.

Structural adjustment exacerbated food insecurity in the Global South and accelerated the loss of agrobiodiversity. To increase the revenues available to service the foreign debt, developing countries were obligated to expand agricultural commodity exports – often at the expense of food production. The emphasis on agricultural export production shifted land and other resources from food crops to cash crops, increased dependence on food imports, eroded crop genetic diversity, and produced a wide range of environmental harms associated with industrial agriculture, including excessive extraction of groundwater for irrigation, contamination of water resources, and higher levels of pesticide-related illnesses.

89. HOLT-GIMENEZ & PATEL, supra note 1, at 45.
90. See id. at 46.
91. See Gonzalez, Markets, Monocultures, and Malnutrition, supra note 67, at 365.
92. See id. at 364-65.
93. See id. 364.
94. See GEORGE, supra note 84, at 59-60; JOHN MADELEY, FOOD FOR ALL: THE NEED FOR A NEW AGRICULTURE 117 (2002); YOUNG, supra note 58, at 43.
95. See Gonzalez, Trade Liberalization, Food Security, and the Environment, supra note 57, at 469-70; STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PARTICIPATORY REV. INITIATIVE, THE POLICY ROOTS OF ECONOMIC CRISIS AND POVERTY: A MULTI-
The WTO Agreement on Agriculture ("Agreement") purported to address the structural inequities in global agricultural trade and to create a "fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system." However, the Agreement contained numerous ambiguities that enabled wealthy countries to subsidize and protect the domestic agricultural sector while constraining the ability of developing countries to utilize tariffs to protect their small farmers from economically devastating surges of cheap imported food. In effect, the Agreement institutionalized the inequities that permit agricultural producers in the U.S. and the E.U. to destroy the livelihoods of millions of farmers in the developing world by dumping agricultural commodities on world markets at prices that are below the cost of production.

In short, the policies imposed by the post-World War II trade, aid, and financial institutions increased hunger in the Global South by increasing poverty, eliminating social safety nets, depressing food production, and driving small farmers off the land. These policies also produced an unprecedented decline in agrobiodiversity, as small-scale peasant-based agriculture was replaced by the large-scale commercial cultivation of genetically uniform crops.

The primary beneficiaries of this dramatic and ongoing transformation of world agriculture are the large transnational corporations headquartered in the Global North that dominate an increasingly globalized food sector. Supported by decades of government subsidies, overseas food aid programs, and public sector


100. See id. at 450, 465-69.

101. See HOLT-GIMENEZ & PATEL, supra note 1, at 20.
agricultural research, these multinational grain traders, agrochemical corporations, seed manufacturers, and supermarket chains wield unprecedented market power. 102 Two grain companies control 75% of the world's grain trade. 103 Six agrochemical corporations control 75% of global agrochemical sales and also dominate seed markets. 104 Ten corporations control 67% of proprietary seed sales, nearly 90% of the agrochemical market, and 40% of retail grocery sales. 105 This market power enables a handful of transnational corporations to pay farmers relatively low prices for crops even when prices spike on regional and international markets and to charge farmers high prices for inputs such as seeds and fertilizers. 106 In 2008, for example, soaring food prices yielded windfall profits for transnational food conglomerates while swelling the ranks of the world's malnourished people and sparking food riots throughout the Global South. 107


103. VORLEY, supra note 102, at 39.


105. Id. at 4.


107. See HOLT-GIMENEZ & PATEL, supra note 1, at 6-7 (discussing the worldwide “food riots” in 2008 in response to skyrocketing food prices); THE STATE OF AGRICULTURAL COMMODITY MARKETS, supra note 63, at 6, 9 (describing the record increases in global food prices and in global food insecurity in 2006-2008);
However, small farmers did not benefit from these skyrocketing prices because agricultural input prices rose as well and because most small farmers sell their agricultural output to intermediaries rather than directly on world markets. Even if the Global North’s agricultural subsidies were eliminated, the quasi-monopoly power of transnational corporations over the global food chain would continue to distort agricultural markets to the disadvantage of small farmers and consumers.

By disregarding the market distortions caused by the concentration in the food production and distribution chains while imposing free market reforms that constrain the ability of governments in the Global South governments to protect the livelihoods of small farmers, international trade and financial institutions reinforce the dominance transnational agribusiness at the expense of the poor in the developing world. These agribusiness giants, in turn, use their considerable economic and political influence to perpetuate trade, aid and development policies that impoverish small farmers, hasten the demise of biodiverse, environmentally benign farming practices, and threaten the integrity of the world’s food supply. To make matters worse, the alarming decline in agrobiodiversity and the rising levels of food insecurity are occurring at a time when climate change threatens to wreak havoc on global food production.

III. CLIMATE CHANGE

After decades of denial, the risks posed by climate change can no longer be ignored. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports: [GAIN, Corporations are Still Making a Killing from Hunger, 22-23 (April 2009), available at http://www.gain.org/seedling_files/seed-09-04-4.pdf (reporting the profits of the world’s largest agri-food corporations during the 2008 global food price shocks).]

108. See THE STATE OF AGRICULTURAL COMMODITY MARKETS, supra note 63, at 34-35 (explaining why small farmers did not benefit from the global food price increases of 2006-2008).

109. See Gonzalez, Trade Liberalization, Food Security and the Environment, supra note 57, at 490-91; Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, supra note 106, at ¶9; MURPHY, supra note 106, at 21-29, 32.

110. See Gonzalez, Markets, Monocultures, and Malnutrition, supra note 67, at 369-70.

111. See ROSSET, supra note 106, at 41-51; HOLT-GIMENEZ & PATEL, supra note 1, at 81.
Change ("IPCC") observed in a recent report, “warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observation of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level.” The average number of weather related-disasters has increased six-fold in recent decades — from 120 per year in the 1980s to 500 per year currently. As the population increases, more people will experience catastrophic weather-related losses, and the poor will be disproportionately affected by climate-induced disasters.

Climate change poses significant threats to food production. Even if extremely aggressive mitigation measures are adopted, global temperatures are predicted to rise by at least two degrees Centigrade above pre-industrial levels during the 21st century. Changes in temperature and rainfall, as well as increasing frequency and severity of droughts, floods, and pest infestations, threaten the livelihoods of poor farmers and jeopardize global food security. According to the IPCC, yields for rain fed farming could decrease by as much as 50% in large areas of Africa by 2020 as the climate becomes hotter and drier. By 2080, agricultural output could decline by as much as


114. See id.


28% in Africa, 24% in Latin America, and 19% in Asia.\textsuperscript{119} Agricultural output in India could decline by as much as 38%,\textsuperscript{120} and some African countries could experience declines in excess of 50%.\textsuperscript{121} Climate change is also anticipated to severely impact biodiversity by causing the significant extinction of species and the loss of ecosystem services essential to food production.\textsuperscript{122}

Ironically, agriculture is also one of the greatest contributors to global warming. Agriculture is responsible for approximately 13.5% of global greenhouse gas ("GHG") emissions, primarily methane and nitrous oxide.\textsuperscript{123} Changes in land use (such as conversion of forests and other native vegetation to crop land) contribute an additional 17.4% of GHG emissions, mainly in the form of carbon dioxide.\textsuperscript{124} In addition, agriculture contributes to global warming through indirect emissions arising from the manufacture of agricultural inputs (such as nitrogen fertilizer, synthetic pesticides, and fossil fuels used for agricultural machinery) and from the processing, packaging and transportation of food.\textsuperscript{125} If all of these agriculture-related GHG emissions are taken into account, agriculture’s total contribution to global warming may be as high as 32.2%,\textsuperscript{126} making agriculture the single largest source of anthropogenic GHG emissions.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{119} WILLIAM R. CLINE, GLOBAL WARMING AND AGRICULTURE: ESTIMATES BY COUNTRY 79 (2007).
\textsuperscript{120} See id.
\textsuperscript{121} See id. at 67-71, tbl.5.8.
\textsuperscript{122} See Nyong, supra note 4, at 50-51.
\textsuperscript{124} See id.
\textsuperscript{126} BELLARBY ET AL, supra note 125, at 16.
\textsuperscript{127} According to the IPCC, the next largest emitter is the energy supply sector, which is responsible for 25.9% of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. See IPCC, Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report, supra note 120, at 36, fig.2.1.
However, recent studies suggest that agriculture has significant potential to mitigate climate change, which could transform the role of agriculture from a major emitter to a much smaller emitter or even a net sink.\textsuperscript{128} While industrial agriculture is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases, small-scale sustainable agriculture can play a key role in climate change mitigation and adaptation while conserving agrobiodiversity and promoting food security.\textsuperscript{129}

Sustainable agricultural production is a goal rather than a rigid set of practices. In general, sustainable agriculture seeks to integrate natural pest, nutrient, soil, and water management technologies into the production process while reducing the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.\textsuperscript{130} It combines the knowledge and skill of farmers with the latest scientific innovations to promote farmer self-reliance and to minimize dependence on costly external inputs.\textsuperscript{131} Sustainable agriculture also strives to enhance and conserve agrobiodiversity, including plant genetic resources, livestock, insects and soil organisms.\textsuperscript{132}

Sustainable agriculture can mitigate climate change by reducing GHG emissions and increasing carbon sequestration in soils.\textsuperscript{133} Sustainable farming practices reduce fossil fuel-based carbon dioxide emissions because they consume less fossil fuel per hectare than industrial agriculture.\textsuperscript{134} By relying on legumes, manure, and crop residues to fertilize the soil, sustainable agriculture minimizes the use of fossil-fuel based nitrogen fertilizers and also reduces nitrous oxide emissions.\textsuperscript{135} Furthermore, sustainable farming usually involves practices such as the use of green and animal manure, crop rotation, intercropping, and composting that reduce soil erosion and enhance

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{128} See ORGANIC FARMING AND CLIMATE CHANGE, supra note 118, at 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{129} See WORKING GROUP ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT, OTHER WORLDS ARE POSSIBLE: HUMAN PROGRESS IN AN AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE 40-42 (Nov. 2009), available at http://www.iied.org/pubs/pdfs/1002211ED.pdf; ORGANIC FARMING AND CLIMATE CHANGE, supra note 125, at 21.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} See PRETTY, REGENERATING AGRICULTURE, supra note 9, at 8-13.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} JULES N. PRETTY, AGRI-CULTURE: RECONNECTING PEOPLE, LAND AND NATURE 56 (2002).
  \item \textsuperscript{132} THRUPP, LINKING BIODIVERSITY AND AGRICULTURE, supra note 81, at 1-4, 10-12.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} ORGANIC FARMING AND CLIMATE CHANGE, supra note 125, at 7-8.
  \item \textsuperscript{134} Id. at 9, 23; BELLARBY ET AL., supra note 125, at 28.
  \item \textsuperscript{135} ORGANIC FARMING AND CLIMATE CHANGE, supra note 125, at 10, 23; BELLARBY ET AL., supra note 127, at 29, 35-36.
\end{itemize}
the ability of soil to sequester carbon.\textsuperscript{136} Agroforestry promotes the sequestration of carbon in above-ground vegetation as well as soil.\textsuperscript{137} Finally, sustainable agriculture simultaneously enhances agricultural productivity and soil carbon sequestration by restoring soils that have been degraded by excessive disturbance, erosion, organic matter loss, salinization and other processes.\textsuperscript{138}

The mitigation potential of agriculture is enormous. Sustainable agriculture could sequester nearly 40\% of annual carbon dioxide emissions.\textsuperscript{139} According to the IPCC, soil carbon sequestration alone is responsible for 89\% of agriculture’s mitigation potential.\textsuperscript{140} The majority of this carbon sequestration potential (about 70\%) is concentrated in developing countries.\textsuperscript{141} Moreover, agricultural mitigation strategies can be implemented at an extremely low cost, as compared to mitigation options in non-agricultural sectors, such as energy, transportation and forestry.\textsuperscript{142}

Sustainable agriculture can also play an important role in climate change adaptation. Sustainable farming practices reduce the vulnerability of crops to floods and drought by increasing the organic matter in soils, thereby enhancing the soils’ water retention capacity.\textsuperscript{143} Farmers practicing sustainable agriculture are better able to cope with hurricanes, droughts, and other extreme weather events than conventional farmers.\textsuperscript{144} Surveys following Hurricane Mitch in Central America, for example, found that the lands of farmers practicing sustainable agriculture had 40\% more topsoil, greater levels of moisture, more vegetation, and less erosion than the lands of

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  \item \textsuperscript{136} Organic Farming and Climate Change, supra note 125, at 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{137} Id. at 15, 23; Bellarby et al., supra note 125, at 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{138} See Organic Farming and Climate Change, supra note 125, at 18, 23; Bellarby et al., supra note 125, at 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{141} Id. at 499.
  \item \textsuperscript{142} See id.
  \item \textsuperscript{143} Organic Farming and Climate Change, supra note 125, at 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} Id at 17-18; PAR Climate Change Project, supra note 43, at 5.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
conventional farmers. \textsuperscript{145} Sustainable farming practices can also restore the productivity of degraded soils in the arid tropics, thus improving agricultural yields to a greater extent than synthetic fertilizers. \textsuperscript{146}

Sustainable agriculture utilizes wild and cultivated landscapes and natural pest control strategies to enhance the resilience of agro-ecosystems to climate change-related disturbances. \textsuperscript{147} Agrobiodiverse food production systems can resist climate-related changes in the geographic range of pests, disease vectors and invasive species through biological control of weeds, insects, and pathogens. \textsuperscript{148} Sustainable agricultural systems rely on the diversity of crops, fields, landscapes and farm activities to buffer the effects of natural disasters and to provide alternative sources of food, fuel, and medicine. \textsuperscript{149}

Finally, sustainable agriculture promotes food security by protecting the livelihoods of small farmers and indigenous communities. \textsuperscript{150} Sustainable farming practices protect and enhance the traditional knowledge and skills that will play an essential role in adapting to climate change. \textsuperscript{151} This knowledge will enable farmers to adapt to climate change by adjusting the timing and location of crop cultivation, breeding seeds suitable for changing thermal and hydrological conditions, changing the timing of irrigation, modifying the management of nutrients, and applying water-conserving technologies. \textsuperscript{152}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{organic} \textit{Organic Farming and Climate Change}, supra note 125, at 18.
\bibitem{id} \textit{Id.}
\bibitem{par} \textit{Id.; PAR Climate Change Project, supra note 43, at 16.}
\bibitem{organic2} \textit{Organic Farming and Climate Change, supra note 125, at 18; PAR Climate Change Project, supra note 43 at 9-11.}
\bibitem{par2} \textit{See PAR Climate Change Project, supra note 43, at 5.}
\bibitem{organic3} \textit{Organic Farming and Climate Change, supra note 125, at 17; PAR Climate Change Project, supra note 43, at 19.}
\end{thebibliography}
IV. INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS TO THE CLIMATE, FOOD AND AGROBIODIVERSITY CRISIS

The food, climate and agrobiodiversity crises described in the preceding sections highlight the urgent need for reform of global agricultural policies. Because agriculture both generates and sequesters GHGs, climate change may serve as a catalyst for agricultural policy reforms that promote sustainable agriculture as an integrated solution to the climate, food and agrobiodiversity crises. Sustainable agriculture produces fewer GHGs emissions than industrial agriculture, increases the ability of soils to sequester carbon, protects plant genetic resources, reduces the risks associated with climate change (such as floods and droughts), preserves traditional knowledge, and promotes food security by supporting the livelihoods of small farmers.153

In addition, sustainable agriculture is highly productive. Sustainable agriculture can produce enough food on a global per capita basis to sustain both current and projected future populations without increasing the amount of land devoted to agricultural production.154 Indeed, sustainable agriculture in the Global South is at least eighty percent more productive than conventional agriculture.155 Numerous studies have concluded that sustainable agriculture has significantly increased agricultural yields in Asia, Africa and Latin America, increased the incomes of small farmers, benefited the environment, reduced dependence on external inputs, and kept alive rural communities’ deep reservoir of traditional knowledge.156

153. See supra notes 128-52.
155. See id. at 91; Jules N. Pretty et al., Resource-Conserving Agriculture Increases Yields in Developing Countries, 40 ENVTL. SCI. & TECH. 1114 (2006).
There is an emerging consensus among policy-makers at the international level that promoting sustainable agriculture is necessary to address the environmental and food security challenges of the 21st century. Reform of the global food system to promote sustainable agriculture is a daunting task, but there are a number of concrete measures that can be taken to address the most glaring inequities and move toward a more just and sustainable food production system.

First, phasing out agricultural protectionism in the Global North is an essential step toward protecting the livelihoods of small farmers, but it is by no means sufficient. An approach to international trade, aid, and finance that recognizes the primacy of human rights, including the fundamental right to food, is required. The right to food is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Because a healthy environment is itself a human right in addition to being essential to the fulfillment of the right to food and other human rights, trade and investment agreements should contain a provision...
giving human rights and environmental norms hierarchical priority in the event of a conflict.

Second, trade and investment agreements should contain broad human rights and environmental exceptions designed to maximize the flexibility of governments to regulate in the public interest. Such provisions would give developing countries the "policy space" to utilize an appropriate combination of tariffs and subsidies to protect the livelihoods of small farmers, encourage domestic food production, support environmentally friendly cultivation techniques, promote rural development, and protect against devastating surges of under-priced food imports.

Third, trade and investment agreements must enable developing countries to use a wide range of protectionist measures to facilitate the transition from agro-export specialization to a more diverse economic base. The current rules governing international trade preclude the Global South from utilizing many of the development strategies that produced economic prosperity in the United States, France, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other wealthy countries, such as local content requirements, state financing of major industries, and protection of nascent industries through tariffs and other import restrictions.160

Fourth, international regulation is necessary to address the domination of agricultural markets by a handful of transnational corporations. In the United States, for example, the Justice Department is in the process of conducting an antitrust investigation of the seed industry and is also examining the lack of competition in agricultural markets more generally.161 The European Parliament recently asked the European Commission to address the abuse of market power by major supermarket chains operating in the European Union.162

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Given the global scope of the problem, it is essential that states collaborate to develop and enforce robust competition regimes.

Fifth, governments must re-orient resources toward small farmers and toward the protection of the natural resource base necessary for food production. The structural adjustment policies adopted in recent decades have deprived small farmers of social safety nets, education, marketing assistance, credit, technology, insurance, input subsidies, and price supports. In recognition of the essential role of small-scale sustainable agriculture in responding to the food, climate, and biodiversity crises, a coalition of African governments, with the support of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, and various non-governmental organizations, has proposed that the successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol provide the financing, technology, and research and development necessary to promote climate change mitigation and adaptation through small-scale sustainable agriculture. While an analysis of this proposal is beyond the scope of this Article, it is promising that agriculture and food security have


at long last been recognized as important issues in the global climate change negotiations.

Finally, the global food system must be protected against food commodity speculation and ill-advised biofuels policies that could result in food price increases, food price volatility, and "land grabs" in the Global South. It is now widely recognized that one of the key triggers of the food price crisis of 2008 was the shift of speculative investment into agricultural commodities in the wake of the collapse of the U.S. housing bubble.165 Furthermore, the decision by the United States and the European Union to promote biofuels as the solution to the climate crisis has driven up food prices and diverted acreage from food production.166 The biofuels boom and the spike in food prices, in turn, gave rise to efforts by domestic and foreign investors to purchase or lease large tracts of agricultural land in the Global South to guarantee food supplies and to capitalize on the demand for biofuels through offshore production.167 These so-called "land grabs" pose a number of risks, including dispossession of small farmers, interference with domestic food production, and over-exploitation, degradation, and depletion of land and water resources needed by local communities.168 Regulation of food commodity derivatives must be a central part of government strategies designed to protect the fundamental human right to food.169 Biofuels policy must be pursued through an integrated approach that takes into account the impact on food production, biodiversity and human rights. Foreign acquisition of agricultural lands must be carefully regulated through domestic legislation and international agreements

168. Id. at 43-48.
to ensure that these transactions benefit local communities, uphold
the right to food, and use natural resources in a sustainable manner.

In response to the global food crisis, social movements across the
globe are challenging the export-oriented industrial agricultural
model of food production in favor of food sovereignty.\textsuperscript{170} Developed
originally by the peasant organization La Via Campesina, the concept
of food sovereignty refers to democratic national and local control
over food production, distribution, and marketing in ways that are
socially just and ecologically sustainable.\textsuperscript{171} As Peter Rosset
explains:

Food sovereignty proponents argue that food and farming
are about more than trade, and that production for local and
national markets is more important than production for
export from various perspectives: broad-based and
inclusive local and national economic development,
addressing poverty and hunger; preserving rural life,
economies, and environments; and managing natural
resources in a sustainable fashion. They argue that every
country and people must have the right and the ability to
define their own food, farming, and agricultural policies; to
protect domestic markets; and to have public sector budgets
for agriculture that may include subsidies provided these do
not lead to greater production, exports, dumping and
damage to other countries. . . . This alternative model also
includes agrarian reform, with limits on maximum farm
size, equitable local control over resources like seeds, land,
water and forests, and firm opposition to patenting seeds.\textsuperscript{172}

Food sovereignty has been embraced by social movements in the
Global North and the Global South,\textsuperscript{173} has been incorporated into the
domestic legislation of several countries, including Venezuela,

\textsuperscript{170} See Rosset, supra note 106, at 102-25 (reproducing the statements and
position papers of peasant and farmer organizations from the Global North and the
Global South); Shattuck & Holt-Gimenez, supra note 5, at 422, 431.
\textsuperscript{171} Rosset, supra note 106, at 34-35; Shattuck & Holt-Gimenez, supra note 5,
at 422, 431-32.
\textsuperscript{172} Rosset, supra note 106, at 34-35.
\textsuperscript{173} See Shattuck & Holt-Gimenez, supra note 5, at 431.
Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia,¹⁷⁴ and has served as the basis for collaboration between the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and farmer and civil society organizations.¹⁷⁵ Food sovereignty is not a one-size-fits-all economic recipe.¹⁷⁶ Rather, it is a framework through which to critique the corporate-dominated food trade and production system so as to develop more democratic, localized, just, and sustainable alternatives.¹⁷⁷

V. CONCLUSION

Scientists, development experts, farmer organizations, and civil society groups have long called for equitable and sustainable locally-controlled food production as an alternative to resource-extractive industrial agriculture.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, rural communities throughout the world have been struggling for decades to diversify their crops; conserve their seeds, soils, forests and water; protect traditional agroecological knowledge; and resist the takeover of their lands by local and transnational elites.¹⁷⁹ Most recently, the growing food justice movements in the Global North have sought to dismantle the inequities in the global food system that disproportionately affect low-income and historically marginalized communities and that produce widespread epidemics of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and other diet-related diseases.¹⁸⁰ As the common roots of the climate, food, and agrobiodiversity crises become increasingly apparent, popular mobilization may succeed in creating the political will necessary to overcome the power of transnational agribusiness and to create more just, resilient, and sustainable food production systems.

¹⁷⁵. See ROSSET, supra note 106, at 35.
¹⁷⁶. Araujo, supra note 174, at 494-96.
¹⁷⁷. Id. at 494-95.
¹⁷⁸. See HOLT-GIMENEZ & PATEL, supra note 1, at 2-3; 181-217.
¹⁷⁹. See id. at 2.
¹⁸⁰. See id. at 159-77; SHATTUCK & HOLT-GIMENEZ, supra note 5, at 431-34.