

# Small farmers feed the world: Industrial agrofuels fuel hunger and poverty

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Sharratt<info@cban.ca><p>Via Campesina Position Paper</p><p>Presented to the media on June 24th, 2008 in Jakarta during the International Conference on Peasant Rights. ?Right to grow, right to feed, right to eat?</p><p>The current massive wave of investment in energy production based on cultivating and industrial processing of vegetal materials like corn, soy, palm oil, sugarcane, canola, etc, will neither solve the climate crisis nor the energy crisis. It will also bring disastrous social and environmental consequences. It creates a new and very serious threat to food production by small farmers and to the attainment of food sovereignty for the world population.</p><p>Over the last twenty years the neoliberal policies adopted globally have failed to answer people's basic needs. The FAO promises at the 1996 World Food Summit and the UN Millennium Development Goals to lift people out of poverty have not been kept. Many more people are suffering from hunger.</p><p>It is claimed that agrofuels will help fight climate change. In reality, the opposite is true. The new extensive monoculture plantations for the production of agrofuels are increasing greenhouse gases through deforestation, drainage of wetlands, and dismantling communal lands. If we take into account the whole cycle of production, transformation, distribution of agrofuels, they do not produce less greenhouse gas than fossil fuels, except in some cases. Moreover, agrofuels will never be able to replace fossil fuels. According to the latest estimates, they will only cover the future rise in consumption from now until 2020. There is simply not enough land in the world to generate all the fuel necessary for an industrial society whose needs for transport of people and goods are continually increasing. The promise of agrofuels creates the illusion that we can continue to consume energy at a never growing rate. The only answer to the threat of climate change is to reduce energy use worldwide, and to redirect international trade towards local markets.</p><p>Meanwhile, the social and ecological impacts of agrofuel development will be devastating. Monoculture and industrial agriculture, whether for agrofuel or any other production, are destroying land, forests, water and biodiversity. They drive family farmers, men and women, off their land. It is estimated that five million farmers have been expelled from their land to create space for monocultures in Indonesia; five million in Brazil, four million in Colombia... Industrial agriculture generates much less employment than sustainable family farming; this is an agriculture without farmers.</p><p>The current expansion of agrofuel production contributes to the massive concentration of capital by landowners, large companies and TNCs, provoking a real counter-reform throughout the world. Moreover it contributes to increased speculation on food products and land prices.</p><p>Agrofuel production has already started to replace food production. Its ongoing extension will drive even more small scale farmers and indigenous peoples off their lands. Instead of dedicating land and water to food production, these resources are being diverted to produce energy in the form of diesel and ethanol. Today peasants and small farmers, indigenous people, women and men, produce the huge majority of the food consumed worldwide. If not prevented now, agrofuels will occupy our lands and food will become even more scarce and expensive.</p><p>Who would eat agrofuels?</p><p>A new alliance of some governments with automotive and chemical companies, oil and agro-industry is promoting agrofuels with the sole objective of making money. The fear of climate change and energy crisis is used to develop agrofuel production in a manner that maintains and strengthens an agro-industrial model. Knowing that this model is, in itself, a major cause of climate change and an intensive energy consumer, is no obstacle.</p><p>Technology and market control of the TNCs strengthen and increase their hold over the agrarian sector. The family farmers whose food production has been based on traditional seeds, are displaced, their coexistence with biodiversity, their way of producing energy by human and animal force are disrupted. Their way of life uses much less energy per unit of food produced, and especially, fewer fossil fuels.</p><p>Agribusiness companies are aware that agrofuels produced on a large scale are not economically viable. The race towards agrofuels is made possible by the huge direct and indirect subsidies from supporting governments and by speculation on the financial markets, which is also causing food prices to rise.</p><p>The figures cited are alarming. Millions of hectares and billions of dollars are mentioned: the government of India is contemplating planting 14 million hectares with "jatrofa", the Inter-American Bank of Development says that Brazil has 120 million hectares ready for agrofuel production and a business lobby suggests that there are 397 million hectares available in 15 African countries. This means a level of expropriations without precedent.</p><p>While TNCs and investment funds increase their profits, a large part of the world population does not have enough money to buy food. Agrofuels are estimated to be responsible for 30% of the current food price crisis.</p><p>When the TNCs are unable to find farmland for agrofuel production, deforestation is forced on areas that are necessary for the preservation of life on earth.</p>

Thousands of farmers have no alternative but to accept to grow agrofuels as they need an income to support themselves till the next season. National and international agricultural policies imposed by international financial institutions and TNCs have exacerbated the dependence of developing countries, leading to food crisis, extreme poverty, and hunger throughout the world. Therefore, those small farmers are not guilty of making the wrong choice they are the victims of the current system imposed on them.

Small farmers and agricultural workers, working in extremely harsh conditions with damaging effects on their health, with very poor income have no say in the way their production is used. Many are working under contract farming with large agribusiness companies that process, refine and sell the product. Therefore it is the companies who decide to channel the product to the fuel rather than to the food market. The high food prices paid by the consumers are not reflected in the small farmers' income.

In response to energy crisis: small scale production and local consumption

Small scale sustainable farming is essential to feed the world. Sustainable family farming and food sovereignty consume up to 80% less energy than industrial agriculture.

Food sovereignty primarily involves the use of local resources for food production, minimizing imports of raw materials as well as transport. Likewise, the food produced is consumed locally so that the end product does not travel far. It is not logical to eat, in Europe, asparagus coming all the way from the Andes or fresh green beans coming from Kenya.

Throughout the history of farming, villagers have obtained energy from their farmland to meet their daily needs. Peasant families are using coconuts or sunflower oil, biogas, firewood, wind and water to generate electricity for local use. Such methods are sustainable and integrated into the food production cycle on the farmland.

It is imperative to design and adopt responsible attitudes to food consumption and to adjust our way of eating, in the knowledge that the industrial model of production and consumption is destructive, while the peasant-based model of production uses responsible energy practices.

Therefore, Via Campesina continues its struggle against the power of large corporations and supporting political systems. The energy crisis should not be seen as an isolated problem but as part of the whole crisis of the current model of development where profit has priority over people.

Instead, we support a people centered, small-scale diversified agriculture with local markets and healthy livelihoods using less energy and less dependence on external sources. Sustainable family farmers fulfill the fundamental mission of agriculture: to feed people.

Via Campesina denounces:

The neoliberal model, international financial institutions and transnational capital, directly responsible for the food and the climate crisis.

\* Their irresponsible representation of agrofuels as an answer to the climate and energy crisis

\* The scandal of producing agrofuels in a world ravaged by hunger.

\* The passive attitude of many institutions faced with the serious risks posed by the advent of agrofuels which implies that rural and urban populations can neither produce nor consume food.

\* That these same institutions are in fact placing the economic interests of TNCs above the food and nutritional needs of the very people they are entrusted to represent and defend.

\* The insult of continuing to promote agrofuels in spite of the negative energy balance in their production, processing, and transport.

\* The neoliberal model, international financial institutions and transnational capital, directly responsible for the food and the climate crisis.

Via Campesina demands:

The end of corporate driven, monoculture-based production of agrofuels. As a first step, a five year international moratorium on the production, trade and consumption of industrial agrofuels has to be immediately declared.

An in-depth evaluation of social and environmental cost of the agrofuel boom and of profits made by TNCs in the processing and trade of the raw materials.

The promotion and development of small scale production and local consumption models and the rejection of consumerism.

Explicit support from government and institutions to the sustainable peasant-based model of food production and distribution, with its minimal use of energy, its capacity to create jobs, to respect cultural and biological diversity and its positive effect on global warming (fertile soils are the best way to capture CO<sub>2</sub>).

The reorientation of agricultural policies toward sustainable rural communities and livelihoods based on food sovereignty and genuine agrarian reform.

The promotion and development of responsible consumption models.

Let's put out the fire of agrofuels and carry the flame of food sovereignty!

For more information: [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org)