



# Manifesto on the Future of Food

A review by Sisira S Withanachchi

Author: The International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture  
 Publisher: The International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture  
 Published year: 2003

The International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture (2003): *Manifesto on the Future of Food*. San Rossore, Italy: ICFFA. Available online at: [http://commissionecibo.arsia.toscana.it/Uservlets/File/Commiss%20Intern%20Futuro%20Cibo/cibo\\_ing.pdf](http://commissionecibo.arsia.toscana.it/Uservlets/File/Commiss%20Intern%20Futuro%20Cibo/cibo_ing.pdf)

The International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture published the *Manifesto on the Future of Food* as the synergy of the participants who gathered in Tuscany, Italy in 2002 and early 2003. This manifesto stands to strengthen sustainable agriculture, food sovereignty, biodiversity and agricultural diversity with localizing the power of decision making on food production and consumption pattern according to the interests of local people.

The first part of the manifesto with the heading of "Failure of the Industrialised Agricultural Model" discusses the negative consequences of the industrialised food production in the globalised market system. In the Manifesto's own terms, this force is identified as a corporate controlled, technology-based, monoculture and export-oriented system of agriculture (ICFFA 2003:3) which promotes pseudo assumptions for resolving the global problems which are related to food such eradicating hunger and malnutrition on a large scale.

The Manifesto criticises the situation as the reason for growing hunger, landlessness and the immiseration of farmers which should be addressed on a global scale with food and hunger programmes. Furthermore, it is analysed how the global governance of the world food trade system controls farmers' and consumers' rights. For instance, WTO trade principles which support free trade as binding regulation among member countries never allow either sustainable environmental policy or realis-

tic poverty alleviation in poor countries. The only support given is for export-oriented mass production which drags small scale farmers into poverty which transfers onto countries a vulnerable future and environmental pollution as a result of the long distance trade of food production (food miles) (ICFFA 2003:4).

The second section "Principles toward an ecologically and socially sustainable agriculture and food system" elaborates 16 principles which the Manifesto emphasises towards a socially sustainable agriculture and food system. In these principles, it is manifestly urged to consider access to food as a fundamental human right and the production of adequate food for the maintenance of human lives with respect to food sovereignty for every community. Moreover, diversity in agricultural production in the small-scale farming mechanism is proposed as a main principle against globalised and homogenised farming practices. Within those progressive ideas, localisation of decision-making by local farmers according to their agricultural preferences and consumption limitation is highly emphasised with greater attention to a non-corporative and a more decentralized and democratic food governing system. Especially, modern-day popular food technologies such as genetic modification of seeds, synthetic pesticides and fertilizer, and food irradiation are rejected concerning public health and food safety (ICFFA 2003:5). The intellectual property rights and commercial patents of multinational companies over food and local medicine violate local people's long term traditions. Local people are losing their own rights on their own foods and agricultural materials. Also, big multinational companies in the agricultural sector attempt and accomplish to creation of a monopoly over seeds and foods. The Manifesto urges from national and international governance bodies the eradication



of these monopolies behind the commercial patenting. The Manifesto would support the principle of subsidiarity which will affect local-self reliance and long term food security. On the other hand, this will support the alleviation of the environmental pollution because of long distance food exports. However, it is clearly pointed out that the manifesto is not in opposition to trade. It wants to establish fair, voluntary and sustainable trade system based on the standards of communities without international accords where outsiders can control the trade regulation in favour of multi-national trading companies.

The third section, "Living Alternatives to Industrial Agriculture", illustrates some social movements which stand for organising society towards a community friendly food and farming system. The aim of the section is to highlight the practical examples that are already in existence in the real context. The Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil organises landless farmers who endure rural poverty to capture 15 million acres of land all over Brazil. They established about 3000 communities with new socioeconomic settlements with schools and local businesses under the democratisation of access to the lands. The second social programme is the Grammen's Microcredit programme which was introduced by Professor Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh (ICFFA 2003:8-9). This programme allows poor people who are denied being

given credit by conventional banks to access credit for improving local business. In the other examples, the Manifesto points out "Buy Local" campaigns as a community-supported agriculture movement which links local farmers and consumers in EU countries and USA. Furthermore, local stakeholders' progressive activities such as in Brazil Belo Horizonte local government's constitutional implementation for food and citizenship right, Indian dairy cooperative societies who collaborate for fair prices in a fair trade system and moreover disallowing non-family farming so as to encourage family owning farming in nine states and two Pennsylvania townships in USA. On the national scale, some governments in Europe such as Denmark, Austria, Switzerland and Germany are encouraging and initiating organic farming. In the international scale, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety empowers stakeholders including states to protect seed diversity and regional food specialties of local people.

In the fourth section "Trade Rules to Achieve the Aims of the International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture" presents seven revisions which would be advocated for directing the World Trade Organisation (WTO) towards a fair and sustainable trading system

which would facilitate the empowerment of the localisation process of food production and sustain small scale farmers. Recommendations include: permitting tariffs and import quotas that favour subsidiarity, reverse the present rules on intellectual property and patenting and recognise and eliminate the adverse effects of WTO market access rules which would directly address the fundamental changes of the WTO current base of regulations (ICFFA 2003:13-14). However, the paradoxical situation is that while the Manifesto has criticised international intervention over the governance of the voluntary and fair trade system, these recommendations accept the WTO as the international body for the governance of the world trading system without moving towards alternative institutionalisation. Also, some of the recommendations do not align with the WTO structure. Those are corresponding with national level policy implementation without any international policy mediation. For instance, they promote redistributive land reform in national matters which should be dealt with inside the national and local policy setting. Land reform is a factor which directly affects national sovereignty in the international political discourse.

In conclusion, the Manifesto can be recommended as a crucial international contribution. It argues that to achieve and maintain a sustainable and equitable economic system which will directly empower local communities with food security and food sovereignty while respecting local knowledge and practice of agriculture, there must be the establishment of democracy in the trading and decision making process which would orientate inwards towards a localisation of governance.

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