



PROGRAM IN  
**Agrarian Studies**  
YALE UNIVERSITY

# Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
YALE UNIVERSITY  
SEPTEMBER 14-15, 2013

Conference Paper #3

## Farmers, Foodies & First Nations: Getting to Food Sovereignty in Canada

Annette Desmarais and Hannah Wittman

T

N

I



YALE SUSTAINABLE  
FOOD PROJECT

*Food First*

INSTITUTE FOR FOOD AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

ISS  
International  
Institute of Social Studies



ICAS  
Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies

The Journal of  
PEASANT  
STUDIES

critical perspectives on rural politics and development



# Farmers, Foodies and First Nations: Getting to Food Sovereignty in Canada

Annette Desmarais and Hannah Wittman

---

## Conference paper for discussion at:

### **Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue**

International Conference

September 14-15, 2013

## Convened by

---

### **Program in Agrarian Studies, Yale University**

204 Prospect Street, # 204, New Haven, CT 06520 USA

<http://www.yale.edu/agrarianstudies/>

### **The Journal of Peasant Studies**

[www.informaworld.com/jps](http://www.informaworld.com/jps)

### **Yale Sustainable Food Project**

[www.yale.edu/sustainablefood/](http://www.yale.edu/sustainablefood/)

## in collaboration with

---

### **Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy**

398 60th Street, Oakland, CA 94618 USA

[www.foodfirst.org](http://www.foodfirst.org)

### **Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies (ICAS)**

### **International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)**

P.O. Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague, The Netherlands

[www.iss.nl/icas](http://www.iss.nl/icas)

### **Transnational Institute (TNI)**

PO Box 14656, 1001 LD Amsterdam, The Netherlands

[www.tni.org](http://www.tni.org)

## with support from

---

### **The Macmillan Center, the Edward J. and Dorothy Clarke Kempf Memorial Fund and the South Asian Studies Council at Yale University**

[http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/kempf\\_fund.htm](http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/kempf_fund.htm)

<http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/southasia>

*© July 2013 All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher and the author.*

## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

---

This paper examines how the concept and framework of food sovereignty has been incorporated in food policy agendas across diverse sectors of Canadian society, particularly in the work and discourse of the National Farmers Union, Québec’s Union Paysanne, Food Secure Canada, and movements for Indigenous food sovereignty. This analysis highlights both the challenges to conceptualizing food sovereignty, and the tensions in defining inclusive policies that engage with food sovereignty at distinct, and often overlapping, scales. We critically assess how the “unity in diversity” principle of food sovereignty functions in the Canadian context, paying particular attention to the policy implications of debates about the meaning of food sovereignty. What is most evident in examining the demands of a wide range of actors using food sovereignty language in Canada is a shared aim to reclaim a public voice in shaping the food system and a growing convergence around ideals of social justice, environmental sustainability and diversity. But, if food sovereignty is about fundamental transformation of the food system, it is yet in initial stages in this region.

## Introduction

While there is a growing body of literature on food sovereignty at a global level, much less is known about what food sovereignty movements look like in specific places and how their expression is largely shaped by local dynamics. This article provides a critical analysis of how a diverse range of intentions, strategies, tactics and discourses collide under the ‘big tent’ of food sovereignty in Canada. We look at how the concept and framework of food sovereignty has been incorporated in food policy agendas across diverse sectors of Canadian society. This analysis highlights both the challenges to conceptualizing food sovereignty, and the tensions in defining inclusive policies that engage with food sovereignty at distinct, and often overlapping, scales. The ways different actors engage with food sovereignty in Canada requires re-thinking traditional and legal conceptions of sovereignty as more than the ability of a territorially bounded entity to exercise power through domination, a view that perhaps might be more theoretically relevant in national policies for food security. Instead, engaging with the concept of food sovereignty as it has evolved among grassroots actors requires a critical engagement with a new politics of possibility. This involves reconsidering and reframing concepts of collective political will, appropriate authority, governance, self-determination, solidarity, and individual and collective rights (Alfred 1999; Shaw 2008).

Food sovereignty was initially introduced in Canada through the work of the National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Union Paysanne, the two Canadian members of La Vía Campesina. The NFU is unique among Canadian farm organizations: it is the only national, direct-membership, voluntary farm organization in Canada to have been created by an act of Parliament. The NFU describes itself as “working for people’s interests against the corporate control of the food system” (NFU, n.d). Unlike other Canadian commodity farm organizations, it represents

---

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper is under review at the *Journal of Peasant Studies*

farmers producing all kinds of foodstuffs in all regions of the country, except for Quebec.<sup>2</sup> The NFU, as a founding member of La Vía Campesina, actively participated in the key Vía Campesina debates that ultimately defined the concept of food sovereignty. However, it took years before the NFU began using food sovereignty in its domestic work within Canada. Meanwhile, the concept of food sovereignty was central to Québec’s Union Paysanne when that organization was formed in 2001. The Union Paysanne includes farmers, researchers, students, consumer groups, and eco-tourism businesses that joined together to build alternatives to “*malbouffe*” and industrial agriculture.<sup>3</sup> The Union Paysanne emphasizes a peasant agriculture that involves “a human-scale agriculture and vibrant rural communities,” (Union Paysanne, n.d.), and engages in concerted efforts to link producers and consumers.<sup>4</sup> Initially, discussions of food sovereignty in Canada remained focused primarily on agricultural production and agricultural trade policy issues.

This changed after the Nyéléni International Forum for Food Sovereignty held in 2007 in Sélingué, Mali. In addition to representatives of the NFU and the Union Paysanne, a range of other Canadian organizations that were members of Food Secure Canada -- a national civil society alliance involved in work on food security and sustainable food systems -- attended the event. This diverse range of actors came back home committed to working together to consolidate a national food sovereignty movement. This commitment led to the pan-Canadian People’s Food Policy Project (PFPP), launched in 2009, aimed at developing a food sovereignty policy for Canada (Kneen, 2011).<sup>5</sup> The PFPP organized consultations across the country to involve consumers and urban food systems activists in developing food sovereignty language to redefine food and agricultural policies for Canada. While some Indigenous peoples actively participated in the PFPP, several Indigenous organizations also sought to deepen their own indigenous food sovereignty framework, an approach highly critical of a version they view as agriculture- and state-centric. Indigenous food sovereignty activists stress the importance of self-determination and the inclusion of fishing, hunting and gathering as key elements of a food sovereignty approach to sustainable food systems in Canada, and highlight the complexity of issues of sovereignty, authority, individual and collective rights, equity, culture, and (re)distribution of land and other resources.

---

<sup>2</sup> The NFU also includes non-farmer (Associate) members, comprising about 8% of the membership in 2012. Overall, the rural landscape in Canada is populated by numerous agricultural commodity organizations that function primarily to improve the marketing and increase sales of a specific commodity for an integrated national and international market. Examples of such organizations are the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association, Western Canadian Barley Association and the Canadian Canola Growers Association; for a complete list see <http://www.agriguide.ca/home>

<sup>3</sup> *Malbouffe* literally meaning “bad food” is usually translated as junk food. It is a concept used by the Confédération Paysanne in France in its struggle against industrial agriculture. Shortly after the Union Paysanne was formed they invited José Bové, then spokesperson for the Confédération Paysanne, to Québec to exchange ideas about organizing strategies.

<sup>4</sup> The non-farmer members of the Union Paysanne have their own space along with an administrative council and full voting privileges at the Annual Congress.

<sup>5</sup> While Food Secure Canada was instrumental in supporting the Peoples Food Policy Project, these operated as distinct entities.

This article explores the various meanings of food sovereignty developed by distinct actors in Canada to better understand existing challenges, tensions, convergences and divergences in developing a national movement for food sovereignty. We begin with some theoretical reflections on food sovereignty that have informed our analysis of food sovereignty movements in Canada. We then focus on how food sovereignty is manifested in Canada by exploring how three distinct sectors of society-- farmers, foodies and indigenous peoples -- use food sovereignty discourse.<sup>6</sup> We then critically assess how the “unity in diversity” principle of food sovereignty functions in the Canadian context, paying particular attention to the policy implications of debates about the meaning of food sovereignty.

### Food sovereignty: some theoretical considerations

The conceptual framework for food sovereignty is evolving continually, but at its core is a set of goals comprised of protecting community, livelihoods and social and environmental sustainability in the production, consumption and distribution of nutritious and culturally appropriate food. The pursuit of these goals is informed by a range of strategies: respect for place and diversity; acceptance of difference; understanding the role of nature in production; human agency; equitable distribution of resources; dismantling asymmetrical power relations; and building participatory democratic institutions.

To better understand what food sovereignty is – its potential, challenges and limitations as a framework for food system change—we need to look carefully at the social actors involved. As the social movement literature confirms, concepts that have transformatory potential do not appear in a vacuum as disembodied intellectual exercises. Food sovereignty, as it was conceptualized by La Vía Campesina, is a deeply grounded idea embodied initially in the lives of peasants, indigenous peoples and farmers in the North and South and later reworked in interaction with urban-based groups.

Food sovereignty emerged in the debates held within La Vía Campesina as communities in the Global South and the Global North engaged in a collective struggle to define alternatives to the globalization of a neoliberal, highly capitalized, corporate-led model of agricultural development (Desmarais 2007). La Vía Campesina first articulated the basic principles entailed in food sovereignty at its Second International Conference held in Tlaxcala, Mexico (La Vía Campesina 1996a) and then introduced it in the international arena at the civil society conference held in conjunction with the World Food Summit in 1996 (La Vía Campesina 1996b).<sup>7</sup> The only Canadian social actor involved in defining food sovereignty in this early stage was the National Farmers Union, one of the founding members of La Vía Campesina.

---

<sup>6</sup> In the Canadian context “First Nations” refers to aboriginal peoples who are recognized by the constitution. First Nations are distinct from the Inuit and the Métis; while First Nations is a contested term, many Indigenous Peoples refer to their communities as First Nations. In this article we use First Nations and Indigenous Peoples interchangeably.

<sup>7</sup> Among peasant organizations, there have been some references to earlier articulations of food sovereignty by ASOCODE in Central America (Edelman 1999), and also in Mexico. Further consolidation of the meaning of food

There is a growing literature that seeks to explore some of the theoretical dimensions and political implications of food sovereignty (for a more complete review, see Wittman, 2011). Windfuhr and Jonsén (2005) initially highlighted the significant ways in which food sovereignty differs from the right to food and food security while also providing an early analysis of the potential and constraints of a food sovereignty policy approach. Others demonstrate how food sovereignty goes much further than food security and the right to food because it places questions of what food is produced, where, how, by whom, and at what scale at the centre of public debate and also raises similar questions about food consumption and distribution (McMichael 2009; Patel 2009; Wittman et al. 2010; Desmarais 2007).<sup>8</sup> Claeys (2012) sheds light on how the food sovereignty movement's claims to new rights reflect an alternative conception of rights that is more collective and decentralized, with implementation depending not just on states, but also on communities, peoples, and international bodies. Empirically, Isakson's (2009) study in Guatemala and Rosset et al.'s (2011) work on agriculture in Cuba provide key insights concerning the multiple social and environmental benefits of, and the links between, agro-ecological practices, biodiversity conservation, and food sovereignty. These works highlight the role of peasant movements in shifting agricultural development to focus on small-scale production for local markets in efforts to sustain viable livelihoods and rural communities. Other research highlights specific elements of food sovereignty such as agrarian reform (Borras and Franco 2010), rural movements' struggles (Borras et al. 2008), international human rights campaigns (Edelman and James 2011), and food security and food justice (Alkon and Mares 2012).

Food sovereignty proponents seek fundamental social change, a transformation of society as a whole that will be achieved through the vehicle of food and agriculture. To better understand food sovereignty as an organizing frame for transformative social change, it is useful to conceptualize it as a process involving persistent, diverse and interconnected struggles. Ramon Vera (2010), a long time agrarian activist in Mexico puts it like this:

Clearly there is evidence of food sovereignty in the struggles of many around the world. You will not encounter it only in one place and be able to point to concrete examples. . . . Instead, it is a continual struggle. In a place as devastated as Mexico, it is a struggle that you lose and you win every day, little by little. Food sovereignty means working on the health of something that has been deeply devastated and is in need of great repair. . . . Food sovereignty is about the struggles for autonomy, for territorial control, to build strong people's assemblies, to recuperate *lo comunario*; it means building movements to care for the forests, water, recuperate the soil, preservation of ancestral seeds, stopping the entrance of GMOs. These are everyday and permanent struggles.

---

sovereignty emerged as a result of debates within La Vía Campesina. For discussions of the origins of food sovereignty within La Vía Campesina see Desmarais (2007) and Wittman et al. (2010).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the conceptual limitations of food security see Fairbairn (2010) who situates the neoliberal foundations of household food security in the corporate food regime.

How are we to understand this diversity of food sovereignty struggles that Ramon Vera talks about? What Vera is stressing here is the need to pay attention to the multiplicity of sites and the multifaceted nature of resistance. Clearly, food sovereignty in Saskatchewan, Canada will differ from what it looks like in Indonesia or Peru. A range of factors, including history, social relations (class, race, gender, age), ecology, politics and culture, shapes the particular nature of each food sovereignty struggle in any given place. Importantly however, we also need to understand how these various struggles are all connected and how they shape one another.

An analysis of food sovereignty also takes into account the different stages of struggle. On the one hand, in many places, communities might not be using the language of food sovereignty but in fact are engaged in initiatives that fit within a food sovereignty framework. When peasants in local communities in Mexico are fighting to keep Canadian mining companies from accessing land because mining will affect the quality and access to the land and water available for producing food, are they not involved in a food sovereignty struggle? On the other hand, many Vía Campesina organizations have been engaged in food sovereignty work for decades. Most were fighting to have a greater say in decision-making about food and agriculture, for the creation of more just policies to ensure the well-being of rural communities, control of markets, and agrarian reform.

La Vía Campesina's notion of food sovereignty emerged in the international public space that peasants, indigenous peoples, and farmers created and consolidated as a transnational community of resistance. That process of imagination, contestation and negotiation involved a deep understanding of a global food system that was creating a crisis of global proportions. There was also a deep understanding that problems arising from this system were "rooted in *local* and *national* struggles of dispossession" and destruction of livelihoods (Bush 2010, 121). The production, distribution and consumption of food all take place in specific locales. Food sovereignty then is very much situated; it occurs in a particular place and how it is expressed is determined largely by local dynamics.

Our understanding of food sovereignty also recognizes what Doreen Massey has called "a global sense of place" or what Simon Springer (2011, 525) calls the "relational geographies of resistance" which recognize that the global and local are rarely separable. La Vía Campesina's experience of internationalizing place-based movements (Desmarais 2007) while at the same time globalizing vision, hope and struggle through food sovereignty is a concrete example of local struggles being transformed through engagement with actors and contexts outside their immediate sphere of influence. Thus, the transformatory potential of movements for food sovereignty lie in their broad vision for social change, a collective vision that is shaped by understanding the particularity, diversity and connectedness of food sovereignty struggles.

This means that food sovereignty will be addressed differently in places like Canada - where farm operators in 2011 were less than 1% of the population, production is intensely commercial, and has been organized around international as well as local and national markets since the



colonial period.<sup>9</sup> Yet, in Canada, many of the issues that prompted the emergence of a food sovereignty alternative are deeply felt: collapsing rural communities as a result of the on-going farm income crisis leading to rural exodus, an aging farming population and a decline in public services; farmers' loss of power in the marketplace and in policy-development accompanied by the corporatization of agriculture; and growing concerns from both consumers and producers about human and animal health and welfare, and the environmental, social and economic sustainability of industrial agriculture. These are precisely the issues that have broadened the reach of the food sovereignty discourse to other actors in Canada – consumers, urban food organizations, and indigenous peoples.

### Farmers – cultivating an idea

Agriculture in Canada is regionally specific with large extensive farms in the prairie provinces producing the bulk of the country's grains, oilseeds and beef, while smaller farms in British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario produce commodities such as dairy, vegetables and fruit, and the coastal provinces provide fish and fish products. As a whole the agriculture and agri-food sector is "modern, highly complex, integrated, [and] internationally competitive" (AAFC, 2013). Canada exports approximately 45 percent of its domestic food and agricultural production (AAFC, 2010, quoted in Qualman 2011). As is the case with other industrialized countries, Canadian agricultural policy development over the past three decades shifted back to a "market-liberal paradigm" from a state-assistance perspective adopted during the Second World War (Skogstad 2008). The roots of this transition can be traced to the 1969 Report of the Federal Task Force on Agriculture which advised that it was "desirable to end farming by the individual farmer and shift to capitalist farming . . . In sketching out this kind of model for agriculture circa 1990, we are of course rejecting the 'Public utility' or socialized concept of agriculture." (Quoted in Warnock 1971, 9). Subsequent policies have emphasized the building of a "more market-oriented agri-food industry" while farmers are prompted to be more "self-reliant" and "market responsive" (Agriculture Canada 1989, 30-37), all the while producing more, especially for export markets increasingly controlled by vertically and horizontally integrated transnational agri-business corporations.

The landscape of rural Canada is also ideologically diverse. While some farmer organizations embrace neoliberal ideals of free trade and privatization, others approach food and agriculture from a social and economic justice perspective. The NFU -- which emerged in 1969 as an amalgamation of the provincial farmers unions of Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Ontario and maritime farmers who had not yet formed a union -- has a long history of struggles to support the continuation of alternatives to neoliberal globalization, such as orderly-marketing boards and supply management systems.<sup>10</sup> One of the NFU's main goals is to "work

<sup>9</sup> Operators plus paid farmworkers comprise less than 2% of Canada's total population in 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Supply management is a legislated marketing tool designed to stabilize supply and prices for producers and consumers. In Canada, supply management is used to control the production of dairy, eggs and poultry by allocating a quota. Unlike the other unregulated commodities, farmers in this system are able to recover costs of production because prices are set by a government agency (i.e. the Dairy Commission) that uses a cost-of-production analysis reflecting real on-farm costs.



together to achieve agricultural policies which will ensure dignity and security of income for farm families while enhancing the land for future generations” (National Farmers Union, n.d.). To this end the organization “strives for a system of food production, processing, and distribution that is, in all stages, economically viable, socially just, and ecologically sound. The current system does not meet these criteria and, thus, is not sustainable” (NFU, “Policy on Sustainable Agriculture” n.d. quoted in Beingessner 2013).

The NFU’s critical positions on neoliberal policies that aim to dismantle orderly marketing and supply management while further consolidating the privatization, industrialization and corporatization of the food system are rejected by many of the market-oriented commodity-based groups. For instance, the Western Canadian Wheat Growers’ Association (WCWGA) -- whose membership has “a strong business focus,” and “believe open and competitive markets, innovation and investment are key to creating a stronger and more prosperous agricultural sector” (WCWGA, n.d.) -- mounted a multi-year vocal campaign aimed at eliminating the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), a farmer-controlled, state-sponsored collective marketing agency that sells on behalf of farmers all of the wheat and barley grown on the prairie provinces for export and domestic human consumption. Rejecting single-desk selling and arguing instead for “freedom to market” and dual marketing, the campaign against the CWB escalated throughout the 1990s and 2000s and included direct actions such as illegally trucking grain across the Canadian border into the United States of America.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the NFU saw farmer-controlled, collective marketing -- elements central to the effective functioning of the CWB -- as expressions of food sovereignty. In efforts to maintain and strengthen the CWB, the NFU worked with allies, including the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, to demonstrate how dual marketing would lead to the demise of the CWB and demand that farmers be allowed to vote on whether or not the monopoly of the CWB should be maintained. The NFU also spearheaded the formation of the Friends of the Canadian Wheat Board, a coalition of farm organizations and individuals, including non-farmers, that has legally challenged the Government of Canada (FCWB, N.d).

In essence, the fight to keep the CWB can be considered a long-standing food sovereignty struggle in Canada, but it gets more complicated when moving beyond the Canadian border. It was initially waged by the NFU’s predecessors, the provincial prairie farmers unions, that fought for a stronger farmers’ voice and collective marketing against the increasing market power of private corporations involved in the export-based grain trade in Western Canada (Magnan 2011,

---

<sup>11</sup> Resistance to the CWB began much earlier, from several fronts. The Palliser Wheat Growers Association, formed in 1970 and predecessor to the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association, sought the outright abolishment of the CWB (Magnan 2011, 116). Magnan (2011) suggests that the WCWGA together with the provincial government of Alberta and conservative federal governments attacked the CWB’s single-desk selling monopoly primarily because they saw it as an “illegitimate infringement on the right of farmers to market their grain independently,” and argued for dual marketing within the CWB. That is, marketing through the CWB should be voluntary to enable farmers to exercise the right to choose how they want their grain marketed, either through the CWB or through private companies. Foreign interests such as commodity groups and transnational grain companies have also tried to end the CWB’s single-desk selling power and they have enlisted government support to do so. The government of the United States of America has pursued numerous (14 to date) legal trade challenges -- all have been unsuccessful (Magnan 2011, 117).

118). As Magnan explains, the more recent conflicts over the CWB “intersect with food sovereignty by pitting collective marketing against neoliberal ideals of market efficiency, free enterprise and free trade” (2011,116) while seeking to strengthen farmers’ “market power and democratic control over farmers’ own marketing arm” (2011, 129).<sup>12</sup> It is not clear, however, how the presence of the CWB in the international markets affects food sovereignty struggles elsewhere. While there is recognition that the purpose of the CWB is to protect the interests of Canadian farmers, some NFU members acknowledge that greater understanding of the consequences for farmers elsewhere is needed. One member of the NFU suggested, “some of the things that we are fighting for don’t fall into food sovereignty. The CWB had a huge campaign about white flour and noodles in foreign markets (rice growing areas). This is in direct opposition of what we are fighting for” (NFU workshop, 2011).

Ideological divergences are also at the heart of the struggle to maintain supply management in the production of dairy, eggs and poultry, a system under increasing threat at the WTO deliberations and at even greater risk in the current Canada-European Comprehensive Trade and Economic Agreement (CETA) and Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations. The NFU and the Union Paysanne support supply management as an effective mechanism to implement food sovereignty, and are calling to expand this system to other commodities. However, both organizations recognize deep flaws in how supply management is practiced in Canada. The overcapitalization of quota has led to a significant increase in the size of existing dairy and poultry farms while the high cost of the quota effectively blocks the entry of new farmers into the supply-managed sector. Rather than abandoning the idea of supply management, the NFU argues that the whole system needs to be overhauled to remain true to its original purpose:

Under no circumstances should quotas be marketable or negotiable between producers. All production quotas should revert to the market agency for reallocation when no longer required by a producer. Priorities should be given to small and new producers, provided the new producers do not fall into the agribusiness category. . . . Quotas now held by agribusiness and other commercial corporate entities should be frozen” (NFU 2011).

In Québec, the Union Paysanne (n.d.) has a similar position, stressing the importance of a system that supports small-scale production. It was a vocal and visible actor in the struggle over intensive livestock operations in Quebec that helped lead to a moratorium on large hog operations by the Government of Québec. The Union Paysanne was formed in May 2001 as an alternative to the mainstream and dominant Union de Producteurs Agricoles du Québec (UPA), an organization that also uses the language of food sovereignty but calls for supply

---

<sup>12</sup> This farmer market power and democratic decision is now on hold. The NFU reports “In 2011 the federal government passed a law, Bill C 18, to dismantle the 75-year-old Canadian Wheat Board . . . . The law was passed in defiance of a Federal Court ruling that deemed the introduction of the bill to be contrary to the rule of law, because the binding farmer vote on proposed changes to the single desk was not held as required under the Canadian Wheat Board Act in force at the time. The federal government began implementing Bill C-18 regardless of the court ruling, yet it is also appealing the ruling. Farmers have launched a class action lawsuit to overturn Bill C-18 (see [www.cwbclassaction.ca](http://www.cwbclassaction.ca)). Their claim includes charges under Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including breach of the Right to Freedom of Association and of the Right to Freedom of Expression” (NFU 2012b).

management to be maintained largely as is. The UPA claims that it is “actually the single mouthpiece, the official voice that speaks on behalf of all Quebec farmers” (UPA, N.d). This claim was facilitated by a provincial law introduced in 1972 that formally recognized the UPA as the province’s only legitimate farm organization. While the UPA also defends collective marketing and supply management, it is an organization that “has a history of supporting industrial agriculture” (Kneen 2011, 89) and represents the interests of a number of large producer cooperatives, although it also has members who are small and medium-scale farmers.

In many ways, the Union Paysanne ideologically represents everything that the UPA is not,<sup>13</sup> yet both use the language of food sovereignty, with very different meanings. The Union Paysanne’s demands for a peoples’ food sovereignty that emphasizes social and environmental sustainability including, most notably, producers’ control over the factors of production, appear to be drowned out by the more prominent voices for a state-led food sovereignty as expressed by Québec’s large Coalition *Souveraineté Alimentaire*, a group that pulls together 86 organizations including members of the UPA. In May 2013 the Parti Québécois, referencing La Vía Campesina, officially launched a food sovereignty policy as a framework for all future decision-making on agriculture and food in Québec (MAPAQ 2013). The impetus for this policy is twofold. The Parti Québécois is undoubtedly using the idea of state-led food sovereignty to oppose federal government attempts to push through the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement which threatens the supply managed industry in Québec. Secondly, the language of food sovereignty resonates in the historical context of a strong political movement in Québec, *le mouvement souverainiste*, led by the Parti Québécois, for national sovereignty for the province of Québec.

The Union Paysanne’s vision, like that of La Vía Campesina, sees the state as having a critical role in building food sovereignty. But theirs is a bottom-up, rather than top down, process in which communities define what kind of food systems are wanted, to which the state would respond accordingly. Consequently, while the organization sees some positive aspects to Québec’s food sovereignty policy – it supports the aim, among other things, to have 50% of the food consumed in the province be sourced within the province – the Union Paysanne is voicing strong opposition to the latest government policy. The Union Paysanne argues that the Government of Québec is misappropriating and instrumentalizing food sovereignty language to introduce a policy that reinforces aspects of large-scale industrial agricultural production and processing, rather than one that would help transform the food system in Québec (Union Paysanne 2013). For the Union Paysanne, introducing a policy geared to have more food produced for local consumption also necessarily entails democratizing the food system so that citizens are involved in deciding what food is produced, where and how it is grown and who grows it. Second, it claims that taking steps towards food sovereignty would entail

---

<sup>13</sup> These ideological divergences exhibited at the local and national levels were subsequently manifested at the international level, mainly through the La Vía Campesina and the International Federation of Agricultural Producers which had diametrically opposing positions and strategies on key agricultural issues (Desmarais 2007; Borras 2010). The Union Paysanne formally joined La Vía Campesina in 2004 and the UPA, through its membership to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, had been a member of the IFAP for many years. IFAP was formally dissolved in November 2010 (ILO 2012).

implementing the more substantial recommendations that emerged from the two-year consultative process (2006-2008) that yielded the Pronovost Report.<sup>14</sup> Among the report's fifty recommendations are dismantling the UPA's monopoly on farmer representation, changing the collective marketing mechanisms to allow for on-farm sales, restructuring the Farm Income Stabilization Insurance Program that currently favours large-scale production, replacing it with a mechanism that is universal but also places a cap on the amount allocated, and compensating those using environmentally sound practices. The Union Paysanne claims that the new food sovereignty policy is in fact "green-washing" and it is demanding that the Government of Québec retract "food sovereignty" and instead, call it a policy of food self-sufficiency (Radio-Canada, 2013).

Although divergences exist in demands among farmer organizations in Canada, these organizations have occasionally joined together in resistance movements focused on particular issues. In doing so they have made important links with urban-based civil society, non-profit, charitable and consumer-based organizations to wage campaigns around cross-cutting issues of agriculture, health, and environmental protection. One example is the successful farmer-led struggle against GM wheat that involved the participation of environmental groups (including Greenpeace Canada and the Sierra Club of Canada), the National Health Coalition, the Council of Canadians, and the NFU along with some mainstream farm organizations like the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan and the Keystone Agricultural Producers (Eaton 2013, 100-101; Peekhaus 2013).<sup>15</sup> A prior example is the broad grassroots movement that engaged in a decade-long struggle between 1987-1998 to successfully block the registration of Recombinant Bovine Somatotrophin (BST) or rBGH in Canada (Sharratt 2001). The NFU initially worked at consolidating joint positions among different farm organizations and then subsequently garnered the support of the Council of Canadians, a 35,000 strong citizens' organization that had formed primarily to expand the notion and practice of democracy and resist the Canadian government's embrace of free trade and privatization. Eventually, resistance grew to include consumer groups, food policy councils, and community-based organizations. As Sharratt's (2001) study of the decade-long struggle explained

The diversity of the opposition was its greatest strength; farmers spoke out against animal ill-health and threats to the dairy industry, consumers demanded safe milk,

---

<sup>14</sup> In 2006 the Government of Québec constituted the *Commission sur l'Avenir de l'Agriculture et de l'Agroalimentaire Québécois* (The Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Agri-food of Québec) to examine current challenges and existing public policies and make recommendations for improvements within the agriculture and agrifood sector. The Commission, headed by Jean Pronovost, engaged in extensive consultations holding public sessions (in fifteen regions and twenty-seven municipalities) that included 770 presentations by different stakeholders. The 2008 report (Agriculture and Agrifood: Securing and Building the Future) is most often referred to as the Pronovost Report, available at

<http://www.caaaq.gouv.qc.ca/userfiles/File/Dossiers%2012%20fevrier/Rapport%20CAAAQ%20anglais.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> The anti-GM wheat struggle occurred some years after genetically modified canola had been accepted and spread quickly and widely across the Canadian rural landscape. The ETC Group (Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration), formerly known as the Rural Advancement Foundation International, has played a key role in the Canadian resistance to biotechnology (and nanotechnology) in agriculture and food (Peekhaus 2013).

and government scientists exposed industry pressure and inadequate science. Each voice in opposition was a strong and legitimate voice for a constituency of people who were actively opposed to rBGH. . . . With a truly grassroots and national movement against rBGH, Monsanto was unable to target individuals or groups to discredit. Canadians organized to defeat rBGH without a national organization concerned with food issues or a visible consumer's movement. The scrutiny of rBGH by both MPs and Senators restored hope in Canada that the mechanisms of the parliamentary system can function for the public interest.

### Foodies: bringing farmers and eaters to a shared table

Historically, governments have used a cheap food policy to enable low industrial wages. In the current environment, however, much of the low-priced food in Canada is imported and discipline in wages is accomplished through the possibility of exporting jobs. At the same time that Canadians spend on average just over 10% of their income on food, food insecurity is growing. Between 2007 and 2011 the percentage of Canadians accessing food banks increased from 7.7 to 8.2 percent of the population; in 2011 over 900,000 Canadians accessed the Food Bank each month (UNHRC 2012). Recognizing the need to politicize problems of both production and consumption within a common food policy framework, in 2004, a national food movement began to emerge as food activists, farmers, members of community-based organizations, indigenous peoples, nutritionists and researchers from across the country defined a three-pronged organizational strategy aimed at zero hunger, building a sustainable food system and ensuring healthy and safe food (Kneen 2011).

Formally constituted in 2006, Food Secure Canada/Sécurité Alimentaire initially voiced its concerns mainly through a food security lens. A more recent shift to using the language of food sovereignty is due to three main developments. First, the NFU, as a founding member of Food Secure Canada, was increasingly using the language of food sovereignty. Simultaneously, indigenous peoples within the movement brought to the table discussions of indigenous food sovereignty, forming an Indigenous Circle within Food Secure Canada. Second, several members of Food Secure Canada participated in the Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty and returned to Canada convinced that the language and conceptual framework of food sovereignty captured more effectively the kind of food systems they were striving to build. Third, that conviction led to the development of the People's Food Policy Project (PFPP), which was geared to collectively define a national food sovereignty policy for Canada. The PFPP organized various consultation spaces including 350 kitchen table meetings involving approximately 3500 people across the country, submission of individual and group policy position papers, conference calls, and three conferences.<sup>16</sup> This two year participatory process (2009-2011) led to the publication of a consultative document entitled "Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada" (PFPP 2011). This is described by Food Secure Canada as a "living" document that is expected to evolve and change as new issues arise and/or new approaches are agreed upon.

<sup>16</sup> A similar consultative and participatory cross-sectoral process, called the People's Food Commission, had been organized by civil society organizations in the late 1970s in Canada (People's Food Commission 1980).

At the same time that national level civil-society mobilization around the framework of food sovereignty was occurring through the work of Food Secure Canada, a food sovereignty discourse was increasingly taking root in local and regional non-profit, charitable, and consumer-based organizations like the Young Agrarians, Slow Food convivia, faith-based groups like Unitarian Service Committee (USC) of Canada and the United Church of Canada (United Church of Canada 2013), and urban food distribution networks like FoodShare Toronto (Johnston and Baker 2005) and The Stop Food Distribution Centre.<sup>17</sup> These groups take on the framework of food sovereignty primarily from the perspective of food consumers with an active desire to connect to local and regional food production systems. For example, the NFU Youth Coalition was instrumental in instigating the formation of the Young Agrarians network in British Columbia, which uses social media like Twitter and Facebook to “engage young farmers, would-be farmers and the public in the reshaping of our food system.”<sup>18</sup>

The consumer-citizens (also known as locavores or foodies) who populate many of Canada’s urban alternative food networks are often initially concerned with issues of taste, health and the local environment that affect their daily lives and those of their immediate communities (Johnston, 2008; Johnston & Baumann, 2010).<sup>19</sup> In response, these networks tend to advocate the construction of very local (i.e. 100 mile diet) food systems that are intended to make fresher and nutritious food more available while celebrating local and regional cultures (e.g. Gibb and Wittman 2013). This ethic is expressed in the explosion of citizen-driven municipal food policy councils across Canada that have been instrumental in increasing the scale and scope of farmers’ markets, community gardens, farm-to-school lunch programs, and the diversification of municipal landscaping to include edible plants. But unlike the work of organizations like the NFU, the Union Paysanne, and Food Secure Canada, which advocate changes in provincial, and international policy around agri-food systems, the policy demands among most local food networks in Canada are relatively understated, despite using language echoing food sovereignty concerns in local organizing, events, and websites. The consumer-oriented focus on the principles of individual ethical consumption may sideline a focus on “structural causes and collective solutions required to fix the industrial food system,” leading urban foodies to be perhaps less likely to advocate for specific policies and programs like supply management that would lead to broader food system change at the national and international levels (Johnston and Bauman, 2010: 129). This local food movement narrative tends to celebrate local food, rather than criticizing food injustice. In the words of one member of a Canadian local food non-profit:

We are for, rather than against. E.g. we are for local and sustainable, supports for farmers to access land, freely traded and shared seeds rather than against GE [genetic

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.foodshare.net> and <http://www.thestop.org/>. For analysis of various food initiatives in Ontario see Friedmann (2007 and 2011).

<sup>18</sup> [youngagrarians.org/about](http://youngagrarians.org/about)

<sup>19</sup> The term foodie is politically contested, perceived by some as a symbol of elitism and exclusion divorced from the issues of social justice, and by others as simply a term that describes an “eater” that is engaged with learning about food and the food system (cf. Johnston and Bauman 2010). We use it here in the latter sense.



engineering]. Food banks tend not to use “food sovereignty;” they use “food security.” But to take one step further is take it to a power place, and not many food banks do that. Little grassroots organizations do, of course, and societies that aren’t charities. Non-profit societies have a lot more freedom. (Interview 4/23/2013)

Highly visible “foodie” organizations focus their effort on voluntarily constructing localized food systems from the bottom up – building farmers’ markets, guerilla gardening, local food potlucks, community gardens. Nevertheless, the things foodies care about (“geographic specificity, ‘simplicity,’ personal connection, history and tradition, and ethnic connection” (Johnston and Bauman, 2010: 73)) along with environmental and health issues, are shared by the food sovereignty framework. In this sense, the scaling up of food sovereignty discourse and activity by consumers and urban based food justice organizations like Food Secure Canada has given a new focus and constituency to the movement beyond the traditional food-producing members of La Via Campesina. As Cathleen Kneen, the co-founder of Food Secure Canada, argues, the

[People’s Food Policy Project] builds on the local organizing that is already going on in the multiplicity of food self-reliance projects in both rural and urban areas, and its method is to overcome the ‘individual’ by starting with the personal...They can then begin to think in terms of policies that will actually support food sovereignty (2010, 234).

### First Nations – decolonizing food sovereignty in Canada?

Organizations including the British Columbia Food Systems Network Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty and the Food Secure Canada Indigenous Circle in Canada are approaching the framework of food sovereignty from yet another direction. Indigenous communities in Canada have had a long and critical engagement with the concept of sovereignty, questioning to what extent this [Western] concept reflects indigenous self-determination and the relationship between autonomy and respectful inter-dependency between communities (c.f. Alfred, 1999). Rather than building a new localized (and agriculture-centric) food system as an alternative to the global, industrial system – the language of much of the civil society food networks referenced above—indigenous communities seek to honor, value and protect traditional food practices and networks in the face of ongoing pressures of colonization.

Indigenous peoples in Canada face a significantly different set of challenges related to food sovereignty compared to most Canadian farmers or members of urban and local food advocacy groups. These include disproportionate experiences of ill-health compared with the rest of the population, with an overall 5-7 year shorter life expectancy a result of disproportionate access to health, education and other public services, higher poverty rates, and diet-related issues (Adelson, 2005; Estey, Kmetec, & Reading, 2007). Food insecurity rates for indigenous peoples living off reserve are 33% and in some communities, particularly in the north, reach 75% (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012; Thompson et al., 2011).



Colonization and unresolved treaty processes have resulted in the loss of widespread access to traditional territories and relationships supporting the hunting, gathering, fishing, cultivation, and trading of traditional indigenous foods (Morrison, 2011; N. J. Turner & Loewen, 1998; N. J. Turner & Turner, 2008). The disruption of traditional indigenous food trading and knowledge networks have resulted in high food prices in remote communities, a decline in the use of traditional foods by young people, in particular, and escalating transport costs (Thompson et al., 2011). Even so, 40-50% of indigenous communities in British Columbia, for example, still obtain some food locally through harvesting, hunting, fishing, and gathering (FNHC, 2009). In these communities, over 200 different types of traditional foods are regularly harvested (Chan et al., 2011); and contemporary food sharing and trading relationships exist among and between distinct First Nations (N.J. Turner and Loewen 1998; Morrison 2011).

Community consultations with indigenous peoples have documented the continued importance of traditional foods and foodways to indigenous health and cultural well-being in urban areas and have drawn attention to problems of lack of access to these (Elliott et al, 2012; Mundel & Chapman, 2010). These consultations have resulted in the self-definition of a concept of Indigenous food sovereignty, a framework that explicitly recognizes the social and economic relationships that underlie inter-community food sharing and trading as a mechanism for indigenous health and well being. In the words of Dawn Morrison, the coordinator of the British Columbia Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, the

concept of Indigenous food sovereignty describes, rather than defines, the present day strategies that enable and support the ability of Indigenous communities to sustain traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, farming and distribution practices, the way we have done for thousands of years prior to contact with the first European settlers...We have rejected a formal universal definition of sovereignty in favour of one that respects the sovereign rights and power of each distinct nation to identify the characteristics of our cultures and what it means to be Indigenous (Morrison 2011, p 97-98).

The Indigenous Circle within Food Secure Canada brought these discussions to the People's Food Policy Project, resulting in the addition of a seventh pillar, beyond the six pillars of food sovereignty developed at Nyéléni. The project's Indigenous Circle emphasized that "Food sovereignty understands food as sacred, part of the web of relationships with the natural world that define culture and community" (People's Food Policy Project 2011). Kneen (2011, 92) says this seventh pillar is "foundational" because:

If food is sacred, it cannot be treated as a mere commodity, manipulated into junk foods or taken from people's mouths to feed animals or vehicles. If the ways in which we get food are similarly sacred, Mother Earth cannot be enslaved and forced to produce what we want, when and where we want it, through our technological tools. And of course, if food is sacred, the role of those who provide food is respected and supported.

To translate the elements of indigenous food sovereignty into a policy framework, Morrison (2011) summarizes four main principles that Elders, traditional harvesters, and community members have identified within the BCFSN to guide work on food sovereignty. In addition to the idea that *Food is Sacred*, these discussions have emphasized the importance of *Participation* at individual, family, community, and regional levels. *Self-determination* refers to the “freedom and ability to respond to our own needs for healthy, culturally-adapted Indigenous foods. It represents the freedom and ability to make decisions over the amount and quality of food we hunt, fish, gather, grow and eat (100)”. Finally, *Legislation and Policy Reform* attempts to “reconcile Indigenous food and cultural values with colonial laws, policies and mainstream economic activities” (101). This principle has resulted in significant mobilization around policy reform in forestry, fisheries, and health programming.

In several important recent court cases, indigenous communities have been successful in re-establishing a framework for self-determined access to traditional fishing and hunting grounds. The Nuu chah nulth Fisheries case (finalized in 2009 after a decade in court) challenged federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans restrictions on indigenous commercial fisheries, affirming “the nation’s right to implement fishing and harvesting strategies according to its own unique cultural, economic and ecological considerations” (Morrison 2011; Dolha 2009). More recently, indigenous food sovereignty proponents have joined with local food networks and environmental organizations to protest the effects of open-pen farmed Atlantic salmon on the British Columbia coast. Over 90% controlled by three Norwegian companies, farmed salmon has been B.C.’s largest agricultural export since 2005, but a number of studies now provide evidence that fish farming in B.C. contributes to the erosion of wild salmon runs throughout the province, primarily via the infestations of sea lice, which are transferred to out-migrating wild juvenile salmon (Frazer 2009; Krkosek, Lewis et al. 2006).

In the fall of 2012, the passage of a federal omnibus bill made sweeping changes to a range of legislative policies, including the Fisheries Act and the Indian Act. Bill C-45 reduced protections for millions of waterways and made it easier to force indigenous communities to surrender reserve land to extractive industries, catalyzing the Idle No More indigenous sovereignty movement.<sup>20</sup> Through numerous demonstrations across Canada during the winter of 2013, Idle No More brought to public attention a range of policy initiatives that threaten treaty rights and indigenous sovereignty. Arguing that “we are in a critical time where lives, lands, waters and Creation are at-risk and they must be protected” (Idle No More & Defenders of the Land, 2013), members of the movement sought alliances with non-indigenous allies and environmental groups around the common themes of indigenous food sovereignty and environmental protection. Both the NFU (2013) and Food Secure Canada stood in solidarity, as stated in a Food Secure Canada resolution:

---

<sup>20</sup> The Idle No More movement “revolves around Indigenous Ways of Knowing rooted in Indigenous Sovereignty to protect water, air, land and all creation for future generations.” The movement seeks the “revitalization of Indigenous peoples through Awareness and Empowerment” (Idle no more 2013). See <http://idlenomore.ca> for more information.

We stand with Idle No More and call upon the Government of Canada to remedy its historical and current policies of colonization, assimilation and destruction, and work with each Nation to define and engage in an appropriate relationship based on respect and responsibility and full recognition of the right to self-determination. Healing and rebuilding contemporary relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government and honouring original nation-to-nation agreements are crucial steps towards achieving food sovereignty and food security for all. (Food Secure Canada, 2013)

## Reshaping the Political

A universal conceptualization of food sovereignty is challenged by the diversity of communities using the language of food sovereignty in Canada. Distinct national, provincial, regional and cultural concerns in terms of community identity and subjectivity, and relationships to political and institutional authority, mean food sovereignty doesn't map tidily onto a national, or even provincial, scale. This poses significant challenges to building a cohesive national movement. However, the expanding discourse around food sovereignty in Canada has resulted in a reshaping of the political spaces in which decisions and value shifts around food production and consumption occur. For the NFU, this means continuing its engagement with national politics around international trade agreements like CETA and TPP. It also includes on-going work at the provincial and municipal levels while also reaching out to new constituencies, like small-scale fruit and vegetable producers in BC and Ontario and urban consumers, who self-identify as members of local food movements. Finally, for indigenous communities engaged in their own struggles to reclaim traditional territories and rights related to self-determination around their food systems, the use of food sovereignty discourse requires detaching the word sovereignty from its historical and legal meanings and reconstructing elements of popular control, autonomy and inter-dependence (Alfred, 1999, 59).

Do current mobilizations for Food Sovereignty in Canada exhibit a "unity in diversity" to share an organizing frame for transformative food system change? There are contradictory positions: for example, the UPA, the *Coalition Souveraineté Alimentaire* and the Union Paysanne do not agree on the definition and purpose of food sovereignty. On the other hand, members of Food Secure Canada – which include more than 50 provincial and 12 national organizations – have consolidated a set of policy demands framed as food sovereignty. These demands encompass the work of regional organizations for localized food economies, but clearly situated within the national and global food system. Emphasizing that "the core of food sovereignty is reclaiming public decision-making power in the food system" (PFPP, 2011: 9), the policy demands resulting from the People's Food Policy Project include:

- Ensuring that food is eaten as close as possible to where it is produced (domestic/regional purchasing policies for institutions and large food retailers, community-supported agriculture, farmers markets).
- Supporting food providers in a widespread shift to ecological production in both urban and rural settings (organic agriculture, community-managed fisheries,

indigenous food systems, etc.), including policies for the entry of new farmers into agriculture.

- Enacting a strong federal poverty elimination and prevention program, with measurable targets and timelines, to ensure Canadians can better afford healthy food.
- Creating a nationally-funded Children and Food strategy (including school meal programs, school gardens, and food literacy programs) to ensure that all children at all times have access to the food required for healthy lives.
- Ensuring that the public, especially the most marginalized, are actively involved in decisions that affect the food system. (PFPP 2011, 2).

The current negotiating text of CETA indicates that “local governments will no longer be legally able to give preference to local or Canadian suppliers”), a key demand of locavore and municipal food policy councils (Shrybman, 2010). The NFU, for example, has an articulated position on CETA, but urban proponents of municipal and school food programs do not often articulate clear demands around international trade policy as a threat to food sovereignty. Similarly, vibrant movements and campaigns for an expansion of urban agriculture are occupying unused urban lots and advocating for changes to municipal bylaws to allow the sale of produce from backyard gardens. But to date, these groups demonstrate little visible engagement or connection with the Farmland Defense League and other movements seeking to protect access to farmland threatened by urban sprawl, or with indigenous groups advocating for hunting and fishing reserves, or with environmental and indigenous groups to protect salmon fisheries from habitat degradation resulting from mining and resource extraction. Unlike the farmer, indigenous and food insecure populations also involved with Food Secure Canada, some urban consumer constituency groups operate from a position of relative privilege, and are less present in political advocacy work at the national and international scale. Municipal food policy councils are also limited in the scale/scope of their policy arena, rarely getting into issues of social justice, labour, or international trade (City of Vancouver, 2013; Toronto Public Health, 2010; Mansfield & Mendes, 2013).

Even so, food sovereignty discourse in Canada is changing, no longer concerned primarily with production and marketing concerns like supply management, orderly marketing and international trade policy. It is making inroads in civil society-based and urban food networks like Food Secure Canada who support farmer and indigenous-led struggles over the shape and direction of food sovereignty, but who also lead initiatives around socially just food consumption that bridges the conceptual gap between food producers and marginalized/food-insecure populations. One example is Edmonton’s Good Food Box Programme (GFB), originally designed in 2009 as a non-profit social enterprise to expand access to locally produced food to urban residents, to provide “fair market value to producers...to be accessible to all and to create jobs for low-income residents” (Connelly, Markey, & Roseland, 2011: 314). Capitalizing on the growing urban demand for local food, the GFB has expanded its offerings to include prepared and specialized foods oriented towards “niche foodie and middle class-markets” to achieve a critical mass to support additional investment in local food infrastructure (315). In this example, food system transformation happens at a local scale through the political

education of an urban consumer population. This consumer base took on the idea of local food to begin to engage with the broader food system, by participating in local food policy councils, locavore and Slow Food events and healthy eating initiatives.

In addition to embracing *Resetting the Table* as a people’s national food policy for Canada, Food Secure Canada—in cooperation with indigenous organizations, the NFU, and other groups—facilitated broad consultations with the UN Special Rapporteur during his Right to Food country mission to Canada, the first such mission to an OECD country. These organizations saw the Mission to Canada as a unique opportunity to give visibility to the human rights concerns of the industrial food system and inadequate social policies in Canada, particularly around food insecurity and indigenous access to traditional food provisioning systems. In contradiction, the conservative Government of Canada’s response was altogether different. Some high-level federal government officials refused to meet with the Special Rapporteur, while others criticized him for being “ill-informed, patronizing” (Whittington 2012). Other officials dismissed the visit to Canada to investigate questions related to the human right to food as inappropriate.

What is most evident in examining the demands of a wide range of actors using food sovereignty language in Canada is their shared aim to reclaim a public voice in shaping the food system. There is a growing convergence around a discourse and practice of social justice, ethical foods, and cultural diversity – all key elements of the People’s Food Policy Framework. How that power is claimed is diverse, and occurs at different locations and scales - through demands to address the structural causes of unjust and environmentally damaging agri-food and trade policies at provincial national and international policy levels; through the ability to make more sustainable choices as individual consumers within a local food system; and through struggles for decolonization and self-determination by indigenous peoples. Whether these distinct manifestations of food sovereignty in Canada – which each in their own way work towards the transformation of existing structures of food production and food access - will make inroads into a broader food system transformation is still unclear. Thus, if food sovereignty is about fundamental transformation of existing structures, ways of thinking and being, then this implies a constant process of struggle that is at its initial stages in Canada.

### Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the BC Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty for ongoing conversations around the intersection between agrarian and indigenous visions of food sovereignty. We also thank Anelyse Weiler for research assistance and the two external reviewers for helpful suggestions to improve the paper.

## References

- Adelson, N. 2005. The embodiment of inequity: health disparities in Aboriginal Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, S45–S61.
- Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC). 2013. An overview of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food system. Ottawa: AAFC Available at <http://www4.agr.gc.ca/AAFC-AAC/display-afficher.do?id=1331319696826>
- Agriculture Canada. 1989. *Growing together: A vision for Canada's Agri-Food Industry*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.
- Alfred, T. (1999). *Peace, power, righteousness: an indigenous manifesto*. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press.
- Alkon, A. H., & Mares, T. M. 2012. Food sovereignty in US food movements: radical visions and neoliberal constraints. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 29(3), 347–359.
- Beingessner, N. 2013. *Alternative Land Tenure: A Path Towards Food Sovereignty in Saskatchewan?* Unpublished Masters Thesis, Department of Justice Studies, University of Regina. Saskatchewan.
- Blouin, C., J.F. Lemay, K. Ashraf, J. Imai and L. Konforti. 2009. “Local food policies and public policy: A review of the literature.” Report published by Equiterre and the Centre for Trade Policy and Law at Carlton University, Ottawa.
- Borras, S. 2010. The politics of transnational agrarian movements. *Development and Change*, 41(5), 771-803.
- Borras, S. and J. Franco. 2010. Food sovereignty and redistributive land policies. In: H. Wittman et al (eds.) *Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, nature and community*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, pp. 106-119.
- Borras, S., M. Edelman and C. Kay. 2008. *Transnational agrarian movements: Confronting globalization*. Southern Gate, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bush, R. 2010. Food riots: poverty, power and protest. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 10(1), 119-129
- Chan, L., O. Receveur, D. Sharp, H. Schwartz, A. Ing and C. Tikhonov. 2011. *First Nations food, nutrition and environment study (FNFNES): Results from British Columbia (2008/2009)*. Vancouver: University of Northern British Columbia, pp. 1-216.
- City of Vancouver. 2013. *What feeds us: Vancouver Food Strategy*. Vancouver, BC: City of Vancouver, pp. 1-150.
- Claeys, P. 2012. The creation of new rights by the food sovereignty movement: the challenge of institutionalizing subversion. *Sociology*, 46(5), 844-860.
- Connelly, S., S. Markey and M. Roseland. 2011. Bridging sustainability and the social economy: Achieving community transformation through local food initiatives. *Critical Social Policy*, 31(2), 308–324.
- Desmarais, A. A. 2007. *La Vía Campesina: Globalization and the power of peasants*. Halifax and London: Fernwood Publishing and Pluto Press.
- Eaton, E. 2013. *Growing Resistance: Canadian Farmers and the Politics of Genetically Modified Wheat*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.



- Edelman, Marc. 1999. *Peasants Against Globalization. Rural Social Movements in Costa Rica*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Edelman, M. and C. James. 2011. Peasants' rights and the UN system: quixotic struggle? Or emancipatory idea whose time has come?" *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 81-108.
- Elliott, B., D. Jayatilaka, C Brown, L. Varley and K.K. Corbett. 2012. "We are not being heard": Aboriginal perspectives on traditional foods access and food security. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2012(6), 1–9.
- Estey, E. A., A.M. Kmetic, and J. Reading. 2007. Innovative approaches in public health research: Applying life course epidemiology to aboriginal health research. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 98, 444–446.
- FCWB. (Friends of the Canadian Wheat Board) (N.d.). <http://friendsofcwb.ca/> [Accessed May 24, 2013].
- Food Secure Canada. 2013. Food Secure Canada Stands in Solidarity with Idle No More. Press release, January 10, Toronto: Food Secure Canada.
- Fieldhouse, P. and S. Thompson. 2012. Tackling food security issues in indigenous communities in Canada: The Manitoba experience. *Nutrition & Dietetics*. 69(3), 217–221.
- First Nations Health Council (FNHC). 2009. *BC First Nation Community Nutrition Needs and Assets Survey*. West Vancouver, BC: First Nations Health Council.
- Friedmann, H. 2007. Scaling up: Bringing public institutions and food service corporations into the project for a local, sustainable food system in Ontario. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 24(3), 389-398.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. Food sovereignty in the Golden Horseshoe region of Ontario In: H.Wittman, A. A. Desmarais and N. Wiebe (eds.) *Food sovereignty in Canada: Creating just and sustainable food systems*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, pp. 169-189.
- Gibb, N., & Wittman, H. (2013). Parallel alternatives: Chinese-Canadian farmers and the Metro Vancouver local food movement. *Local Environment*, 18(1), 1–19.
- Idle No More. 2013. "Idle No More World Day of Action – January 28," Press release issued January 10.
- Idle No More, & Defenders of the Land. 2013. From solidarity spring to sovereignty summer: An international callout to all indigenous peoples, supporters, allies of Idle No More and Defenders of the Land, Available at <http://idlenomore.ca/articles/latest-news/global-news/item/225-sovereignty-summer>. [Accessed May 27].
- ILO. 2012. Governing Body, 315<sup>th</sup> Session, June 15, Geneva. GB.315/INS/INF/1 Available at [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed.../wcms\\_183413.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed.../wcms_183413.pdf) [Accessed June 15, 2013]
- Isakson, S. R. 2009. No hay ganancia en la milpa: the agrarian question, food sovereignty, and the on-farm conservation of agrobiodiversity in the Guatemalan highlands. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(4), 725–759.
- Johnston, J. 2008. The citizen-consumer hybrid: ideological tensions and the case of Whole Foods Market. *Theory and Society*, 37(3), 229–270.
- Johnston, J. and L. Baker. 2005. Eating outside the box: FoodShare's good food box and the challenge of scale. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 22(3), 313-325.
- Johnston, J. and S. Baumann. 2010. *Foodies: democracy and distinction in the gourmet foodscape*. New York: Routledge.



- Kneen, C. 2010. Mobilisation and convergence in a wealthy northern country. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 229–235.
- Kneen, C. 2011. Food Secure Canada: Where agriculture, environment, health, food and justice intersect. In: H.Wittman, A. A. Desmarais and N. Wiebe (eds.) *Food sovereignty in Canada: Creating just and sustainable food systems*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, pp. 80-96.
- La Vía Campesina. 1996a. Proceedings of the II international conference of the Vía Campesina. Brussels: NCOS Publications.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996b. The right to produce and access to land. Position of the Vía Campesina on food sovereignty presented at the World Food Summit, November 13-17, Rome.
- Magnan, A. 2011. The limits of farmer-control: Food sovereignty and conflicts over the Canadian Wheat Board. In: H.Wittman, A. A. Desmarais and N. Wiebe (eds.) *Food sovereignty in Canada: Creating just and sustainable food systems*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, pp. 114-133.
- Mansfield, B. and W. Mendes. 2013. Municipal food strategies and integrated approaches to urban agriculture: Exploring three cases from the global North. *International Planning Studies*, 18(1), 37–60.
- MAPAQ. (Ministère d’Agriculture, Pêcheries et Alimentation de Québec), 2013. “Politique de souveraineté alimentaire.” Ministère d’Agriculture, Pêcheries et Alimentation du Québec, Available at <http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/ministere/politiquesouverainetealimentaire/Pages/Politiquesouverainetealimentaire.aspx> [Accessed May 26, 2013]
- Massey, Doreen. 1991. A Global Sense of Place. *Marxism Today*, June 1991. [http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/index\\_frame.htm](http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/index_frame.htm)
- McMichael, P. 2009. Food sovereignty, social reproduction and the agrarian question. In: A.H. Akram-lodhi and C. Kay (eds.) *Peasants and globalization: political economy, rural transformation and the agrarian question*. London: Routledge, pp. 288-312.
- Morrison, D. 2011. Indigenous food sovereignty – A model for social learning. In: H. Wittman, A. A. Desmarais, & N. Wiebe (Eds.), *Food Sovereignty in Canada: Creating Just and Sustainable Food Systems*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, pp. 97-113.
- Mundel, E. and G.E. Chapman. 2010. A decolonizing approach to health promotion in Canada: the case of the Urban Aboriginal Community Kitchen Garden Project. *Health Promotion International*, 25(2), 166–173.
- NFU (National Farmers Union). n.d. National Farmers Union Policy on Sustainable Agriculture. Available at <http://www.nfu.ca/policy/national-farmers-union-policy-sustainable-agriculture>. [Accessed May 12, 2013].
- \_\_\_\_\_. n.d. “National Farmers Union Canada – Home.” National Farmers Union. [www.nfu.ca](http://www.nfu.ca). [Accessed May 12, 2013].
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. NFU Policy Book, NFU National Office, Saskatoon, SK. Canada.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2012. “Farmers, the Food Chain and Agriculture Policies in Canada in Relation to the Right to Food,” Submission to the Special Rapporteur On The Right To Food, Mr. Olivier De Schutter, Mission to Canada, May 10, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- NFU. 2013. NFU in solidarity with Idle No More. Press release, January 15, Saskatoon, SK. Available at <http://www.nfu.ca/story/national-farmers-union-solidarity-idle-no-more> [Accessed May 28, 2013].

- Patel, Raj. 2009. What does food sovereignty look like? *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(3), 663-673.
- Peekhaus, Wilhelm. 2013. *Resistance is fertile: Canadian struggles on the BioCommons*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press
- People's Food Commission. 1980. *The land of milk and money: The national report of the People's Food Commission*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- People's Food Policy Project. 2011. Resetting the table: A people's food policy for Canada. Available at [www.peoplesfoodpolicy.ca](http://www.peoplesfoodpolicy.ca). [Accessed on May 13, 2013].
- Qualman, Darrin. 2011. Advancing agriculture by destroying farms? The state of agriculture in Canada. In: H. Wittman, A.A. Desmarais and N. Wiebe (eds.) *Food sovereignty in Canada: Creating just and sustainable food systems*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, pp. 20-42.
- Rosset, P., B. Machin Sosa, A. M. Roque Jaime, and D. R. Avila Lozano. 2011. The Campesino-to-Campesino agroecology movement of ANAP in Cuba: Social process methodology in the construction of sustainable peasant agriculture and food sovereignty. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 161-191.
- Radio-Canada. 2013. En quête d'une politique de souveraineté alimentaire. May 16, Available at <http://www.radio-canada.ca/nouvelles/Politique/2013/05/15/007-quebec-en-quete-politique-souverainete-alimentaire.shtml>. [Accessed May 26, 2013].
- Sharratt, L. 2001. No to bovine growth hormone: A story of resistance from Canada. In B. Tokar (ed.) *Redesigning life? The worldwide Challenge to Genetic Engineering*. London: Zed Books, pp. 385-396.
- Shaw, K. 2008. *Indigeneity and Political Theory: Sovereignty and the limits of the political*. New York: Routledge.
- Shrybman, S. (2010). *Municipal procurement implications of the proposed Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the European Union*. Legal Opinion prepared for the Centre for Civic Governance at Columbia Institute. [www.civicgovernance.ca](http://www.civicgovernance.ca).
- Skogstad, Grace. 2008. *Internationalization and Canadian agriculture: Policy and governing paradigms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Springer, Simon. 2011. Public space as emancipation: meditations on anarchism, radical democracy, neoliberalism and violence. *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*. 43 (2), 525-562.
- Thompson, S., A. Gulrukh, M. Ballard, B. Beardy, D. Islam, V. Lozeznik and K Wong. 2011. Is community economic development putting healthy food on the table? Food sovereignty in northern Manitoba's aboriginal communities. *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, 7(2), 14-39.
- Toronto Public Health. (2010). *Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto* (pp. 1-42). City of Toronto.
- Turner, N. J. and D.C. Loewen. 1998. The original "free trade": exchange of botanical products and associated plant knowledge in Northwestern North America. *Anthropologica*, 40(1), 49-70.
- Turner, N. J. and K.L. Turner. 2008. Where our women used to get the food: cumulative effects and loss of ethnobotanical knowledge and practice; case study from coastal British Columbia. *Botany*, 86(2), 103-115.

Union Paysanne. N.d.

[http://www.unionpaysanne.com/images/stories/Doc/fiches/gestion de l offre.pdf](http://www.unionpaysanne.com/images/stories/Doc/fiches/gestion_de_l_offre.pdf)  
[Accessed May 25, 2013]

Union Paysanne. 2013. "L'Union paysanne boycottera la rencontre du ministre Gendron," Press release, March 21, Saint-Hyacinthe, Québec. Available at

<http://www.unionpaysanne.com/communiqués/661-lunion-paysanne-boycottera-la-rencontre-du-ministre-gendron>. [Accessed on May 23, 2013].

United Nations Human Rights Council. 2012. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to Food, Olivier de Schutter: Mission to Canada* (No. A/HRC/22/50/Add.1) Geneva: United Nations General Assembly.

Vera, Ramon. 2011. Interview conducted by Annette Desmarais, February 22, 2011, Mexico City.

Warnock, John. 1971. "The farm crisis." In L. LaPierre, J. McLeod, C. Taylor and W. Young (eds.)

*Essays on the left*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd.

WCWGA (Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association. (N.d.)

<http://www.wheatgrowers.ca/>. [Accessed May 21, 2013].

Whittington, L. 2012. UN food envoy blasts inequality, poverty in Canada | Toronto Star. *The Star*. May 16. Available at

[http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2012/05/16/un food envoy blasts inequality poverty in canada.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2012/05/16/un_food_envoy_blasts_inequality_poverty_in_canada.html) [Accessed June 1, 2013]

Windfuhr, M., and J. Jonsén. 2005. *Food sovereignty: Towards democracy in localized food systems*. Rugby, Warwickshire: ITDG Publishing.

Wittman, H. (2011). Food Sovereignty: A new rights framework for food and nature?

*Environment and Society: Advances in Research*, 2(1), 87–105.

Wittman H., A.A. Desmarais and N. Wiebe. 2011. *Food sovereignty in Canada: Building just and sustainable food systems*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2010. *Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, nature and community*. Halifax and Oakland: Fernwood Publishing and Food First Books.

# FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: A CRITICAL DIALOGUE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PAPER SERIES

## Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
YALE UNIVERSITY  
SEPTEMBER 14-15, 2013



PROGRAM IN  
**Agrarian Studies**  
YALE UNIVERSITY

<http://www.yale.edu/agrarianstudies/foodsovereignty/index.html>

A fundamentally contested concept, food sovereignty has — as a political project and campaign, an alternative, a social movement, and an analytical framework — barged into global agrarian discourse over the last two decades. Since then, it has inspired and mobilized diverse publics: workers, scholars and public intellectuals, farmers and peasant movements, NGOs and human rights activists in the North and global South. The term has become a challenging subject for social science research, and has been interpreted and reinterpreted in a variety of ways by various groups and individuals. Indeed, it is a concept that is broadly defined as the right of peoples to democratically control or determine the shape of their food system, and to produce sufficient and healthy food in culturally appropriate and ecologically sustainable ways in and near their territory. As such it spans issues such as food politics, agroecology, land reform, biofuels, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), urban gardening, the patenting of life forms, labor migration, the feeding of volatile cities, ecological sustainability, and subsistence rights.

Sponsored by the [Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University](#) and the [Journal of Peasant Studies](#), and co-organized by [Food First](#), [Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies \(ICAS\)](#) and the [International Institute of Social Studies \(ISS\)](#) in The Hague, as well as the Amsterdam-based [Transnational Institute \(TNI\)](#), the conference “Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue” will be held at Yale University on September 14–15, 2013. The event will bring together leading scholars and political activists who are advocates of and sympathetic to the idea of food sovereignty, as well as those who are skeptical to the concept of food sovereignty to foster a critical and productive dialogue on the issue. The purpose of the meeting is to examine what food sovereignty might mean, how it might be variously construed, and what policies (e.g. of land use, commodity policy, and food subsidies) it implies. Moreover, such a dialogue aims at exploring whether the subject of food sovereignty has an “intellectual future” in critical agrarian studies and, if so, on what terms.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Annette Aurélie Desmarais](#) is an Associate Professor at the University of Manitoba. She is the author of *La Vía Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants* (Fernwood Publishing and Pluto Press, 2007) which has been published in various languages. Annette co-edited *Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, nature and community* and *Food Sovereignty in Canada*.

[Hannah Wittman](#) is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Land and Food Systems and Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. She conducts collaborative research on food sovereignty, local food systems and agrarian citizenship in Brazil and Canada and is co-editor of *Environment and Citizenship in Latin America: Natures, Subjects and Struggles*; *Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, nature and community*; and *Food Sovereignty in Canada*.