

## Towards Comprehensive Food and Farming Policy

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*There is increasing realization that while various countries have varying levels of success in their food and farming policies, on the whole, at world level, the existing farming and food system is going more and more under the control of big corporate interests in such ways that the most desirable objectives of welfare of farmers, the sustainability of their livelihoods, protection of environment and biodiversity, welfare of animals and above all the sustainable production of safe and healthy food are being increasingly sacrificed and neglected.*

These highly undesirable and high risk tendencies are being pushed by very powerful and resourceful multinational companies which are at present concentrated largely in western countries although they have subsidiaries and partners all over the world and may be joined, perhaps are already being joined, by very big companies from elsewhere too. These companies generally have the support of their governments. The authorities of some of the most powerful countries regard food and farming as a powerful means of securing their influence and control on other countries and societies and some of the more objectionable things these authorities cannot achieve on their own are sought to be achieved through these huge multinational companies.

The reason why they are pushing very harmful and risky technologies is that they aren't really interested in safe and sustainable food availability based on secure and sustainable livelihoods. Their main aim is instead to increase their profits and what is even more important for them is to increase their control which is the gateway to longer-term high profits and domination. Thus these powerful companies and the authorities supporting them are in conflict at very basic levels with the desirable objectives of safe and healthy food based on secure and sustainable livelihoods, protection of environment and biodiversity.

Nevertheless for the sake of expanding their empire and influence they have to claim that they are promoting desirable objectives. As these powerful companies and the authorities supporting them have enormous resources, they can use these resources to endlessly spread their lies and half-truths, to bribe and to threaten.

Hence it is very important to examine carefully alternative policies from the perspective of ensuring secure livelihoods of small and medium farmers, production and availability of safe and healthy food, elimination of hunger and malnutrition, protection of environment and protection/compassion for all forms of life. Increasingly it is necessary to explore and advance the huge true potential of ecologically protective farming systems to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, instead of getting carried away by the attempts of big corporate interests to falsely present their ecologically harmful and disruptive technologies as a solution for climate change.

Here we examine the most important aspects of a desirable food and farming system.

## **1. Production of Safe, Nutritious, Healthy and Adequate Food for All on Sustainable Basis**

Policies should be directed towards mixed cropping systems and rotations which give top priority to production of adequate, nutritious and safe food for all now and in future. More specifically, we need adequate amounts of grains, millets, legumes, vegetables, nuts, fruits and fodder combined with moderate amounts of salt, spices, sugar, milk, milk products, edible oils, tea, coffee, eggs, chicken and fish. Red meat and beef should be reduced as much as possible. The consumption and production of high sugar, high fat, high-salt, highly processed foods should be greatly reduced. Tobacco, alcoholic drinks and intoxicants should be curtailed to an even greater extent, supported by a continuing campaign to reduce their consumption as much as possible. In fact the aim should be to reduce the consumption of tobacco in all forms and all kinds of alcoholic drinks by about 80 per cent or so. All this has to be achieved by strong policy measures and even stronger campaigns within a strong democratic framework where all voices are heard.

The highest priority should be for ensuring safe drinking and cooking water to all people, while also emphasizing water conservation and water saving practices. In addition ensuring safe and easy, healthy and environment friendly cooking fuel should be emphasized.

All the food should be safe. This should be ensured by production and processing methods, legal provisions and educational campaign. In particular food should not be affected and contaminated by dangerous agro-chemicals harmful for health. Food should not come from genetically modified (GM) crops. All GM crops should be banned.

Some of the restrictive policies suggested are in keeping with the needs of health and environment protection at world level as well as requirements of animal welfare. This recommendations may differ for certain climate and geographical zones. The recommendation here is for broad worldwide trends.

First priority in farmland use is for the production of safe, healthy and nutritious food. Second priority is for growing essential raw materials like cotton (non-GM). Any other priority can be considered only after these two needs have been met.

Public distribution system for providing healthy food at subsidized price to all those who need this subsidy, as well as special nutrition schemes play an important role in reducing hunger and malnutrition and should be adequately supported.

## **2. Ensuring Sustainable and Satisfactory Livelihood for Small Farmers, Family Farms and Landless Farm Workers**

Small and middle-level farmers should be highly respected and honored in their capacity as the providers of safe and nutritious food. The prevailing attitude in many countries that their number should be necessarily reduced in the course of time should be given up. Their livelihood based on production of safe, healthy and nutritious food should be strengthened in various ways. All the world's farmland should belong to small and middle-level farmers or their cooperatives. Land in excess of what can reasonably be cultivated by small and

middle-level farmer households should be distributed among those landless farm workers and rural people who are willing to practice sustainable farming for producing safe food. Hence present-day farm workers can also become small farmers. Till this happens other steps to improve their livelihood and welfare should be taken by the government and communities. A fair wage should be ensured to farm workers. They should have a place of honor. Landless persons who provide support to sustainable farming in artisan and ancillary activities should get the same respect as farmers and their welfare and sustainable livelihoods should be ensured.

All those who produce safe food using sustainable methods should be assured of satisfactory selling price and marketing opportunities, including government procurement as well as direct sales to consumers, and this should be strongly helped by public policy and community action. Small and medium traders who play non-exploitative and helpful role, providing useful services based on experience, should be accepted as integral parts of marketing system, but exploitative and speculative traders and big corporate interests should be kept away.

Rural livelihood opportunities in healthy and nutritious food processing should also exist in villages. This can be supported initially by public funds. Suitable small-scale technology for this should be supported. Self-help groups and cooperatives can also take up this work.

Rural livelihood opportunities in diverse areas which do not harm local environment should be promoted widely so that members of farmer and farm worker households have access to supportive additional livelihoods in or near their villages. In particular livelihoods in decentralized renewable energy, water conservation, afforestation, cottage-scale industry and information technology can be promoted but such efforts should be additional to and supportive of prioritizing production of safe and nutritious food. Also farm livelihoods should be made sustainable for future generations by protecting the basic natural resource base (in the form of soil, soil-organisms, water, greenery, supporting other forms of life and knowledge base (particularly traditional knowledge of farming, seeds and related issues).

Farmers who practice natural farming should not be asked to pay anything for certification etc. of their produce as organic. They should be fully supported and not harassed or burdened in any way.

### **3. Protection of Soil, Saving Fertile Land for Producing Safe Food**

Land has been degraded very badly and natural fertility has been eroded over vast areas due to several factors including harmful farming practices and inputs, deforestation, soil erosion, harmful activities in nearby areas, waterlogging, salinization, spread of desert and other factors. Fertile land has been lost to land erosion by rivers, brick-kilns, mines and quarries as well as to industrial and urban use on a massive scale. Fertile land should be protected as much as possible for producing safe food on sustainable basis.

Farm practices which are able to protect and/or restore natural fertility and organic matter should be followed. Maintaining and improving organic content of soil, based on local on-site decomposition of biological material, is crucial. Steps should be taken to prevent water logging and salinity and to reclaim land for farming if possible. Loss of fertile farmland to other uses should be minimized. Use of chemical fertilizers and poisonous, harmful pesticides and other agro-chemicals should be minimized or avoided altogether.

Mixed-farming and crop rotations in keeping with sustaining farm fertility should be encouraged. On land not suitable for agricultural crops as well as on degraded forest land, efforts for tree and bush growth of indigenous species, imitating local natural forest, can be taken up in a big way in ways which provide sustainable livelihoods to landless people in particular.

Anything that results in displacement of farmers from their fertile land and water sources should be avoided as much as possible, and should be completely banned if farmers are practicing natural farming or ecologically protective farming.

#### **4. Conserve Water and Ensure Clean Drinking Water**

High priority should be given to protect this most needed and most essential resource base of farmers and villagers. Rain harvesting and water conservation with community effort should get high priority to maintain proper water table. Highly water-intensive cropping systems or diversion for industrial or other uses beyond the carrying capacity of a region should be checked by public policy and community action before it is too late. Highest priority should be for ensuring clean drinking and cooking water to all people. Next priority should be to provide for hygiene needs and drinking water needs of all animals. Third priority should be for meeting needs of sustainable farming for producing safe food. All wasteful and non-essential excessive uses of water should be discouraged by public policy and community effort.

#### **5. Protecting Traditional Seeds and Biodiversity, including Forest Food**

A great diversity of seeds of food crops and trees, as well as other useful crops and trees, has flourished on earth, nurtured by over a hundred generations of farmers. Much of this has been lost in more recent times which emphasized monocultures of a very narrow genetic base. The rich diversity of traditional seeds should be saved and grown on ordinary farms. These should be widely encouraged among farmers. After a few years of such efforts most farmers will not have to buy any seeds from commercial market. Such efforts should be strongly supported and rewarded by public policy. Free food received from nature, particularly from natural forests, should be highly valued and protected. The knowledge of local communities of this food should be valued, respected and saved.

#### **6. Low-Cost and Low External Input Use Technology**

Farm technology should avoid or minimize external inputs such as chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides. There should be efforts based in local innovations to reduce use of expensive machinery and diesel to the extent possible. For example a farmer's innovation Mangal Turbine (in India) can help greatly to reduce diesel use. Farm animals can contribute greatly even now to reduce costs and external inputs. Dependence on commercial market for seeds can be minimized. The effort should be to continue efforts to reduce costs and increase self-reliance and protect environment.

#### **7. Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

Increasing organic content of soil helps in absorption of carbon dioxide. Increasing green cover, protecting forests and creating new forests of indigenous species which seek to imitate natural forests will help in absorbing greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing chemical

fertilizers and pesticides helps greatly in reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide (including emissions in manufacture and farm use). Diesel and machinery use should be reduced whenever possible. Long-distance marketing and wasteful packaging should be discouraged.

## **8. Adapt to Climate Change**

Self-reliant farming systems which are also low-cost and low external use systems will find it much easier to adapt to climate change. Learning from traditional knowledge, protecting traditional seeds and bio-diversity will further improve this ability.

## **8. Ban GM Crops**

All genetically modified crops (or so called variations in the form of gene-edited crops) should be banned as there are harmful for human and animal health and can be very disruptive ecologically.

## **9. Protecting Animal, Bird, Insect and Micro-organism Friends of Farmers**

A special effort should be made to protect pollinators, also all birds and insects who help farmers in various ways. Farm animals should be protected with concern for their welfare. Bullocks can still play an important role in ploughing and other farm activities. Mechanization is not inevitable and should be adopted only when it appears essential and that too in a restrictive and careful way. Dairy and poultry activities should be taken up in an integrated way with farming whenever possible and should give adequate care to welfare of animals and birds as well. Earthworms should be valued greatly and protected, along with other soil-organisms which enrich soil.

## **10. Observe Nature and Try to Live with Nature's Ways Instead of Disrupting Them**

Perhaps the best way of promoting sustainable farming and sustainable growth of safe food is to observe carefully the ways of nature and carry out farming in tune with nature's ways, without trying to disrupt them. Exactly the opposite of this happened while promoting industrial-style agriculture and this is how most of the damage to health and environment (as well as to sustainability of farms) was inflicted. We now need to get the basics right.

## **11. There Is No Single Formula or Single Person to Follow**

Millions of farmers of world have contributed and are contributing to sustainable production of safe and nutritious food. Several scientists have also contributed to this. There is no single formula, or single leader. The entire effort should be to learn from and build on the contribution made by millions of farmers and some scientists. Region-specific solutions are necessary, so a highly decentralized approach will be needed.

## **12. Decentralized Approach to Research and Extension**

A highly decentralized and participative approach involving close cooperation of rural communities is needed. Farm scientists can certainly help but they should also be willing to learn from farmers, including the work of previous generations of farmers. Above all they should accept the basic perspective of sustainable and self-reliant farming for safe food in

which external inputs are extremely low. Farmers' visits to areas of promising work, their grassroots seminars, workshops, fairs and get-togethers should be encouraged by public policy and community efforts.

### **13. Less Food Miles**

Efforts should be to link local markets with farmers while avoiding very long-distance marketing except in case of special needs. Decentralized procurement by government to procure a part of food crops within a village to support public distribution system and nutrition schemes within the village should be encouraged.

Public policy should encourage and help in promoting close links of farmers with neighboring urban consumers of safe and nutritious food. The government should pay a fair price to purchase safe and nutritious food from farmers to supply to public distribution system and nutrition programs.

### **14. Promote Nutrition Schemes and Kitchen Gardens**

Nutrition schemes to end hunger and malnutrition should get adequate support. Kitchen gardens, particularly among the poorest sections who suffer more from hunger, should be promoted. Food should not travel a very long distance except in case of special needs. The emphasis should be on linking local needs and production.

### **15. Check That Part of International Trade Which Exploits Farmers and Harms Environment, Cancel Land-Grabs**

Trade and other agreements which are detrimental to sustainable production of safe foods, and livelihoods based on this, should not be pursued, or where these already exist, these should be cancelled.

Various agreements of land grab which have captured or try to capture the land and water sources necessary for sustaining rural communities should be cancelled. There should be a big public campaign for this.

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