



**Schola
Campesina**
Sharing knowledge
for food sovereignty

Our Vision

The context

The model of agro-industrial production is unsustainable for the following reasons:

- it is not equitable;
- it depends on non-renewable fossil fuels;
- it is highly polluting, and is one of the main culprits of climate change, due to high level of gas emissions that lead to climate change;
- it produces unhealthy foods;
- it consumes more water;
- it causes the disintegration of communities in rural areas;
- it generates food waste;
- it leads to obesity and famine;¹
- it favours urban growth processes that are unsustainable for the planet;
- it leads to the loss of biodiversity;
- it has devastating effects on the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems;
- it contributes to poverty and inequality.

The agro-industrial model is highly dependent on 'growth' in gross domestic product and business productivity, however, this does not necessarily translate into an increase in agricultural incomes. Thus, the model engenders inequalities, contributes to deep social fractures and it certainly does not lead to better living conditions for humankind. The agro-industrial model seeks to define peasant farmers – an endangered occupation – as "agricultural entrepreneurs". Once ensnared into the agro-industrial supply chain – which pushes peasant farmers to produce raw materials at low costs with hidden high environmental and social costs – the peasant farmer becomes an agricultural worker who is poorly paid but forced to take on entrepreneurial risks. The agro-industrial chain model denies us our knowledge in order to take away our autonomy and transform us into a workforce. In

¹See FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity (SOFI)* 2017.

this system of production, workers' rights are not recognised as they merely represent a cost. All of this demonstrates that the agro-industrial model is socially and environmentally unsustainable. Moreover, it is underpinned by public policies² and health and business standards that have been designed in accordance with this model.³

In contrast to the agro-industrial model, we find a **model based on food sovereignty** that is underpinned by peasant agroecology. It aims for a strong, just and sustainable rural society and is based on individual and collective rights. It distributes wealth, and enhances and contributes to improving peoples' living conditions.

Peasant farming is decidedly innovative, as self-knowledge and the capacity to interact with nature and the territory's community are at the core of peasant farming. The peasant farmer is thus a social partner for responsible territorial development. Without peasant farming and its particular characteristics, such as respect for fundamental rights, knowledge and a sense of community, there is no future for farmers or for humanity itself.

Peasant farming, as a model of social economy, is an alternative to the capitalist model, which plunders the environment and humanity itself. For these reasons, it is necessary to **change the policies and norms** that seek to destroy this model, rather than support it. This does not entail a static defensive strategy: peasant farming is constantly evolving, and agroecology interprets this continuous search for innovation. Markets are regulated. And, of course, we trade internationally as well! But we place ourselves – and our strategic allies – at the heart of a fair local market.

Our vision is to rebuild, defend, energise, exchange and transfer peasant farming knowledge from generation to generation. This knowledge is the heritage of food producers, and also of their communities and like-minded academics – all on an equal footing. Our research is based on a dialogo de saberes (a dialogue of 'ways of knowing'). 'Autonomy' does not mean self-sufficiency in knowledge, but rather the ability to integrate knowledge, including from other sectors (one example is the relationship between computer engineers and small enterprises).

The challenge

There are 1.5 billion peasant farmers and food producers in the world (the largest sector in the world) and they are the founding pillars of economic democracy. In fact, thanks to them, food and agriculture is the only sector of the economy that is not dominated by oligopolies. The Internet is in the hands of 10 companies, the world energy market is possibly in the hands of 20, and most economic sectors are experiencing unprecedented concentration. Food and agriculture is the only sector where there are still 1.5 billion food producers, despite the large number of concentration processes currently ongoing. Hence, a rights-based social and economic model builds on a strong

²See Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union or Agricultural Law of the United States of America.

³See the Agreement on Agriculture of the World Trade Organisation and all the agreements of free trade that are pending ratification.

sector of food producers, peasant farmers, small-scale fishers and pastoralists, and not on the arrogant force of a few.

We can build an alternative model for the entire economy. To this end, the first objective is to dismantle the monopoly over energy resources: the agricultural world should become once again the first producer of energy resources for society – a role it played until the industrial revolution and the arrival of fossil fuels. Then, given the high number of people who use the Internet, the monopoly over the network economy should be dismantled through a strategic alliance with open software engineers (providing freely developed and distributed software). Finally, another objective should be to uphold the public character of research and development and promote a strong role for traditional medicine, using local herbs and local knowledge.

We can build an alternative model if we get rid of the high degree of concentration in the following economic sectors: food and agriculture, energy, the Internet, research and development, medicine and the media. This alternative model is based on individual and collective social, economic and environmental rights, and fosters the participation of all, since without participation and organisation, all of this is impossible.

We must be clear on how we can self-organise and participate in the twenty-first century, and call into question obsolete models from the twentieth century.

Schola Campesina wants to play a part in facing up to this challenge.

Schola Campesina

The origins of the School of Agroecology date back to the 2015 Nyéléni International Forum for Agroecology and to La Via Campesina's schools of agroecology. In that sense, the *Schola* wants to put into practice the principles and action plan of Nyéléni 2015.

The Nyéléni Declaration principles represent our common starting point, on which we base our training and participatory action research activities.

Our principles

The pillars on which we base our work are:

- peasant farmer knowledge;
- the diversity of individual knowledge (e.g. vocation, personal charisma) and gender;
- a dialogue between and the mutual recognition of the various forms of informal (peasant) and formal (academic) knowledge;
- farm autonomy, based on local knowledge and focusing on three distinctive elements: a) plant and animal genetic resources (seeds and native breeds) b) energy resources c) water;
- the local community as a necessary feature for a relationship between all 'ways of knowing';

- the recognition of the importance of community organisation, which is a pre-condition to promote social change: social change is the ultimate goal of organising;
- the recognition of community collective rights stemming from individual rights – the latter do not exist without community rights. In a food sovereignty framework, autonomy and rights are inextricably linked. Without basic rights agroecology cannot exist;
- the translation of social change into norms that are accepted by all, or into policies based on our principles and, thereby, on food sovereignty.
- agricultural and food policies should be based on the autonomy and rights of food producers⁴ and not on trade rules.

Rooted in a Territory

Why does the *Schola Campesina* take place in Rome and in the bio-district of Via Amerina and Le Forre?

We are doing a tremendous amount of work within the framework of the Rome process so that food and agriculture policies, which today are based on trade rules, will tomorrow be based on rights, from the right to food to that of migration. At the same time, a school must be rooted in a territory and a community of knowledge; the bio-district represents these territorial roots.

What do we do?

- We train people specialised in agroecology, who are active in organisations of food producers (peasant farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, farmers, landless ...)
- The training is done through a "*dialogo de saberes*" with multiple organisational forms, both for duration and content.
- The training and research themes are proposed by a pedagogical committee made up of organisations that share the basic principles of *Schola Campesina*.
- We are united and holistic since no solutions are valid if they are only local: Such solutions simply do not work.
- Our starting point is the local level, so that our position is deeply grounded and thereby enhanced, in order to influence change on the global level.
- Our work is constantly in a bi-directional sense: we follow global processes in order to influence them and, at the same time, we apply global outputs at the local level, otherwise, we will not succeed one way or the other.
- The *Schola* values local knowledge and pays specific attention to languages as instruments of popular culture. It aims to go beyond the "colonial" languages: movements should not limit themselves to these languages as an instrument of communication between different 'ways of knowing'.
- In family farming, the transfer of knowledge in agriculture was primarily from father to son and from grandfather to grandson. Given that historically the family structure was often based

⁴See the declaration of peasant and food producers rights.

on patriarchy and has oppressed women for centuries, we must find new ways of ensuring the transfer of knowledge in a world in which farming is not inherited from father to son, but rather, new entrants experience a cultural transition in order to become true peasant farmers or specialists in agroecology/gies.

- The School of Agroecology also supports this transition.

The school supports peasant farmers' and producers' organisations who identify with the food sovereignty movement and with the 2015 Nyéléni Declaration. All resources go towards the training and research activities of the school itself and towards supporting and strengthening the network of schools of agroecology of organisations that identify with this movement and that, on an international level, are part of the alliance of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty.