

# No to agribusiness, yes to agroecology

The global movement of peasants and indigenous people, La Via Campesina, advocates for social transformation and alternative methods of local food production that respect people and the planet.

The agro-industrial food system is dominated by a small number of transnational companies that control everything from seeds to supermarkets: they provide food for only 30% of the world's population but use 75 – 90% of land, water and fossil fuels related to agriculture.

Transnational food production is a major contributor to disease, climate change, environmental collapse and displacement of small scale farmers. For every dollar that consumers pay to the industrial food chain in products, society pays two dollars more for the health and environmental damage this chain causes.

In Latin America up to 80% of deforestation is caused by expansion of

Transnational agribusinesses have turned food production and consumption into one of the greatest health hazards for people and the planet.

**ACTION GROUP ON  
EROSION, TECHNOLOGY  
AND CONCENTRATION  
(ETC GROUP)**



viacampesina.org

the agricultural frontier; globally more than 70% of agricultural land is used for livestock feed.

In comparison, 70% of the world's population are peasants and indigenous peoples who have less than 25% of global land and water, but produce food on small scale farms, and from fishing, urban gardens, and hunting and gathering.

**La Via Campesina (LVC)**, the global movement of millions of peasants and indigenous people, has argued for the past thirty years for a food system that respects human beings and the environment. LVC highlights the fact that Covid-19 and the climate crises have exposed 'the profound dangers this globalised food system and unsustainable capitalism pose to all life forms... We must learn from this crisis and invest in building local, resilient and diverse food systems.'

**Agroecology.** As well as denouncing agribusiness and the role of the World Trade Organisation, LVC is building an alternative model, one based on agroecology. This is a model that is not only about growing healthy local food to enable communities to live well but also about building a new political culture through promoting social transformation.

**Food sovereignty** is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. LVC declaration, 2007

**Climate Justice:** 'It is imperative to create harmony among the living beings of the planet and to cool Mother Earth. Food sovereignty links climate change and the collective rights of humanity, it guarantees the protection of the peasantry, and indigenous people and their role in food production.' La Via Campesina International Collective on the environment and climate justice, Managua, 27 August, 2018

**The Rural Workers Association (ATC), representing Nicaraguan campesinxs**

NSC's partner organisation in Nicaragua, the ATC, was a founder member of LVC when it was set up in 1993.

The organisation has a long history of struggle for peasants' rights going back to 1978 when rural labourers led an insecure, often nomadic life under a semi feudal system of land ownership.

The ATC formed part of a broad alliance that brought the Sandinista government to power in 1979. Agrarian reform was fundamental to building a new society based on social and economic justice.



Organic maize and beans

In the 1980s the ATC played a central role in improving the living and working conditions of campesinxs on state or private farms and farming co-operatives. However, as the US war on Nicaragua intensified, rural areas became the target of Contra attacks: many campesinxs lost their lives defending their families and communities.

After the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, the ATC helped to facilitate a complex process of reconciliation between former Contra and Sandinista peasant families, essential

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Agroecology students harvesting maize

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to recognising common interests over political affiliation.

Under consecutive neoliberal governments from 1990–2006, the ATC organised to defend the gains of the Revolution including the right to retain land distributed through the agrarian reform programme.

Since 2007 the Sandinista government has implemented social programmes based on restoring rights such as free health care and education combined with infrastructure and rural development.

This includes programmes to strengthen the rural economy so that small scale farmers are able to feed their families and communities and contribute to building national food sovereignty. Granting land titles, technical training, credit programmes, and workshops that promote gender equality are some of the great diversity of integrated initiatives. Peasant farmers played a major role in sustaining the country's food supplies through the 2018 crisis.

The ATC movement with 47,000 members has two main areas of work: defending the employment rights of agricultural workers in the banana, coffee, tobacco, and sugarcane industries; and strengthening struggles for political, economic, social and climate justice in rural areas.

Providing training and access to government programmes. This includes courses at five residential centres for community leaders in agroecological farming, political and community organising, and food sovereignty.

Working directly with campesinx communities organised into co-operatives and associations focusing on building local, ecologically diverse food systems and promoting gender equality.

Promoting the interests of rural women and young people. National ATC movements include the Movement of Rural Women (MMC) and the National Youth Movement (MJC).

Further information: [www.friendsatc.org](http://www.friendsatc.org)

## Building a youth movement for agroecology in Latin America

The first Latin American Agroecological Institute (IALA) was set up in 2006 in Venezuela through an agreement between LVC and then Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. Since then eight other IALAs have been established across the region to provide training for young people.

Each IALA has its own dynamic but all use LVC peasant to peasant popular education methodologies combining technical, political and ideological training.

The latest IALA was founded in 2018 by the ATC for young people from Central American and Caribbean organisations. The two year course provides a holistic training based on the values of co-operation, internationalism and the struggle against capitalism.

To deepen the experience of the students IALA Ixim Ulew, like the other IALAs, follows the methodology of alternating time spent on campus with practical application

‘The task we have is to recover the land and our identity as young campesinxs, to have our own land to grow food in a holistic, diversified way.’

**IALA graduate Migdalia Cruz, ATC Jinotega**



in the rural communities.

The first intake of 22 students between the ages of 18 – 30 began their course in February 2018 and graduated in November 2019.

In the context of the COVID crisis the second cohort of 40 students from Mexico, Central American and the Dominican Republic started their online course on 15 April 2020. This means the challenges – and some advantages – of Moodle, Zoom, and Whatsapp.



NSC activists at a national rally organised in London by the Landworkers Alliance, the UK affiliate of LVC

## NSC, working in solidarity with the ATC

This is a critical time for Nicaragua, the second most impoverished country in Latin America and the Caribbean, and a country at the forefront of the climate crisis. As Nicaragua faces the devastation of two hurricanes within two weeks in November, 2020 as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, our partner organisations continue to advocate for social, environmental and economic

justice at national and international levels.

NSC works with the ATC through organising webinars and videos, publishing regular updates, fundraising for UK solidarity work and ATC projects in Nicaragua, and taking part in UK events related to agroecology, food sovereignty and climate justice.

In 2021, in the lead up to the UN climate summit (COP26) in Glasgow in November, we will be organising a UK speaker tour on climate justice by ATC representatives.

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