
What is Food Sovereignty?

The heart of food sovereignty is reclaiming decision-making power in the food system. This means that people have a say in how their food is produced and where it comes from. Food sovereignty seeks to rebuild the relationship between people and the land, and between those who grow and harvest food and those who eat it.

La Via Campesina, the global peasant movement, proposed the concept of food sovereignty at the World Food Summit in 1996. Since then, peasants and marginalized people around the world have anchored this vision of a just and sustainable food system in six interlinked Pillars of Food Sovereignty.

Food Sovereignty in Canada

Canada is a wealthy country, where the food system has for two generations been industrialized and integrated into the global food market. This process has been driven by government policy, which has shifted power from the state to corporations. Our work on food sovereignty in Canada involves uncovering and opposing these policies at the same time as we build alternatives. In this process, we are expanding the global framework with other principles of food sovereignty, building upon and adapting the work of the global movement.

Food Security / Food Sovereignty

The food movement in Canada has generally used the term food security, defining it very broadly. It says that "universal access to appropriate food at all times" requires a local food system which can ensure a basic diet for the population and a living wage for food providers while protecting, if not actually enhancing, the environment upon which it depends. So when we in Canada talk about food security we are talking about equitable access to food and also about extending respect and appreciation to food providers, traditional knowledge, cultural differences, and nature. The language of food sovereignty, as opposed to food security, is more explicit about food citizenship: that people, communities, assume responsibility in maintaining healthy relationships within our food systems.

Food sovereignty includes Indigenous peoples as teachers of food systems that have been sustainable for thousands of years. Indigenous food sovereignty understands food as sacred, part of the web of relationships with the natural world that define culture and community.

Food sovereignty also puts us in a global context, since we know that neither climate nor justice pay much attention to national boundaries. Food sovereignty means working with people everywhere who are struggling to overcome the effects of colonialism, including Indigenous people in Canada, and to learn from their strategies for sustainable livelihoods.

Sovereignty is not just talk and policy analysis, important as these are. Sovereignty means action. It means doing those things that make our communities food secure (like saving and swapping seeds). In that process we identify the policy barriers that are getting in our way, and so together we must also advocate for policy change.

Six pillars of food sovereignty

as developed at the International Forum for Food Sovereignty, Nyéléni Village, Mali – 2007; www.nyeleni.org.

Focuses on Food for People

- Puts people's need for food at the centre of policies
- Insists that food is more than just a commodity

Builds Knowledge and Skills

- Builds on traditional knowledge
- Uses research to support and pass this knowledge to future generations
- Rejects technologies that undermine or contaminate local food systems

Works with Nature

- Optimizes the contributions of ecosystems
- Improves resilience

Values Food Providers

- Supports sustainable livelihoods
- Respects the work of all food providers

Localizes Food Systems

- Reduces distance between food providers and consumers
- Rejects dumping and inappropriate food aid
- Resists dependency on remote and unaccountable corporations

Puts Control Locally

- Places control in the hands of local food providers
- Recognizes the need to inhabit and to share territories
- Rejects the privatization of natural elements



STORIES OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

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The People's Food Policy Project links people from across Canada to find ways that ordinary people can reclaim decision-making power in our food system. This is the core of food sovereignty, and the base of our project to create Canada's first comprehensive federal food policy. The People's Food Policy will reflect and support the work of Canadians to create a food system based on care and respect for humans and the natural world.

This pamphlet is one in a series from the People's Food Policy Project.

WHAT IS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY?



Please share your food stories of hope and struggle with us at: www.peoplesfoodpolicy.ca as well as your policy recommendations for a food sovereign Canada.



Pour une politique alimentaire populaire

People's Food Policy Project

T +1 514 342-5291
E peoplesfoodpolicy@gmail.com
W www.peoplesfoodpolicy.ca

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