

SOW

Small family farmers
feed the world

Much Love

The injustice of hunger

It is a scandal that nearly one billion people are hungry in the world today, when there are the resources to feed everyone. We can change this injustice. Everyone has the right to food and the more than 160 national organizations that make up Caritas Internationalis have joined together in their first ever global campaign to call for an end to hunger by 2025. The United Nations has named 2014 the International Year of Family Farming, because farming is key to ensuring that we can sustainably provide enough food for all.

At DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE, we work with small family farmers in the poorest regions of the world, supporting them in overcoming the challenges of climate change, unjust economic structures and declining access to land, water, and seeds, so they can feed their families and their communities. Women farmers face additional barriers. Despite consisting of close to 50% of the agricultural labour force in the Global South, they have much less access to land, training, and other agricultural necessities. Yet, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), if women gained equal access, they could increase yields by 20-30%, which would eliminate hunger for 100-150 million people.



CANADIAN CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION FOR

**Development
and Peace**

It all starts with a seed

Seeds are the very basis of our food system. As living organisms, each year they are re-born and flourish to feed all of humanity. Small family farmers have been the stewards of seeds for thousands of years, selecting the seeds from the best plants for the next harvest, naturally breeding seeds to create new varieties, and exchanging seeds with other farmers for greater diversity. They have developed an expertise that ensures that seeds are maximised to their full potential in the environments where they grow, and are adaptable to climate change, disease and other blights.

These traditional techniques are responsible for the wide variety of foods that exist around the world today (for instance, there are over 600 varieties of yams!), and this diversity contributes to the resilience of humankind.

Increasing corporate control of seeds, however, is diminishing the Earth's biodiversity and making it more difficult for small family farmers to have access to seeds. Already the world has lost almost 75% of crop varieties, and crop genetic diversity is vanishing at a rate of about 2% per year. In North America alone, we've lost 90% of our fruit and vegetable varieties over the past century! This means small family farmers have a shrinking choice of seed varieties available to them, which creates a less stable food supply for all of us.



The privatization of seeds and the impact on the Global South

The privatization of seeds has been occurring over several decades, and today more than 50% of the global commercial market for seeds is controlled by only three companies. These companies have been engineering genetically modified (GM) seeds that do not occur naturally in nature. These seeds are engineered to resist herbicides and pests through the addition of DNA that does not occur in plants. In addition, these seeds require fertilizers and pesticides, also produced by the companies, to grow. This can cause a farmer to incur extensive debts for using these seeds. In addition, the seeds are patented by the company, which means the farmer can't save the seeds for the following harvest and must purchase new seeds from the company each season.

Companies are given an added advantage in promoting their seeds through bilateral free-trade agreements and other international conventions (see section about UPOV '91), which

encourage governments to put in place laws that make it illegal for farmers to save or use their own seeds because they are uncertified. This also contributes to the cultivation of monocultures, such as soya and corn, using GM seeds, which leads to small family farmers losing their land and to seed uniformity.

Countries in the Global South, where small family farmers provide up to 80% of the food consumed by the population, are seen as new markets for GM seeds. These seeds are being promoted as a potential solution to hunger, but many peasant and community organizations have mobilized to resist the advance of GM seeds in their countries, recognizing the threat they pose to biodiversity, to the rights of farmers and the future of food.

Farmers in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Zambia, Haiti, and many other countries where DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE have partners, have mobilized to call on their governments to ban GM seeds and invest in small family farming as a more viable solution.

The trouble with UPOV '91

Plant breeding is an agricultural practice where seeds are bred with other seeds in order to create a desired change to a plant. It is a process that can take many years. Farmers have been practicing natural plant breeding for thousands of years as a way to improve their crops. In the 1960s, as seeds began to be produced by corporations, there was a call to recognize the intellectual property rights, including royalties, of professional plant breeders for the new plant varieties they created. As a result, the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) was introduced. Many countries signed on to the convention. However, over time it has been updated to incorporate changes in the industry, particularly the development of GM seeds by multinational companies. The latest version, UPOV '91, places greater restrictions on farmers' rights to save, exchange and use seeds. Many countries have not ratified this version, but trade agreements are placing pressure on governments to adopt it.

Here in Canada, our seed system has been built up through the knowledge of farmers, public research and access to farmers' seeds collected from around the world. Over time, a few corporations have captured this heritage, and pushed the Canadian seed system towards GMOs and genetically uniform varieties. As such, farmers' associations and advocates have mobilized against Bill C-18, which is a law that was drafted in order to apply UPOV '91 in Canada. Introduced in Parliament in 2014, the law, if passed, will significantly reduce farmers' rights to use seeds.



What is a GMO: FROM SEED TO PLATE

Comparing the life cycle of a commercial, genetically-modified seed and that of a traditional farmer's seed.

The life cycle of a GM seed that was created by combining the DNA of different species, and is farmed on an industrialized farm.		The life cycle of a farmer's seed grown using sustainable agriculture.
A farmer buys GM corn seeds from a seed corporation.	1	A farmer sows her own corn seeds that she has stored from her last harvest.
The farmer signs a stewardship agreement with the seed corporation.	2	The farmer observes the germination, development, and flowering of the plants.
The farmer plants the seeds and applies the seed corporation's herbicide, which kills every plant that doesn't have the gene that was inserted into the seed. Only the corn survives.	3	The farmer weeds her fields, and uses natural pest control methods.
The farmer sells the crop to a large food processing company.	4	The farmer selects the best corn plants to serve as the seeds for the following crop.
The farmer must buy seeds for the next crop from the seed corporation.	5	The farmer's family eats the corn. Any surplus is sold for extra income for the family.
	6	The farmer stores the seeds, ready for the next sowing season.

Recommendations from the UN special rapporteur on the right to food

In his final report to the UN Human Rights Council after a six-year term as special rapporteur, Olivier De Schutter called for the world's food systems to be radically and democratically redesigned. De Schutter explained how small family farmers and the landless rural poor, including many farmworkers who barely survive from their labour on large plantations, are the majority of those living in extreme poverty.

A major recommendation made by the special rapporteur is to support crop genetic diversity. This is particularly important for small family farmers in developing countries, who still overwhelmingly rely on seeds that they save from their own crops and which they share, exchange or sell. In his recommendations, De Schutter stated that there should not be patents on plants, that farmers' varieties of seeds need to be protected, and that seed exchanges should be supported.

Via Campesina: Seeds are the foundation of life

Many of DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE's partners are members of Via Campesina, a global movement of small family farmers and peasants who are working to achieve food sovereignty. Through a global mobilization of their members, they are educating the world about the urgent need to fight patents on seeds and genetically-engineered seeds. For them, seeds are the foundation of life, and are in a constant process of recreation. Via Campesina views seeds as a key part of cultures developed by past generations that carry the acquired knowledge of farming communities worldwide. Members of Via Campesina around the world, including the National Farmers' Union here in Canada, and many of our partner organizations in the Global South, are demanding that the right of farmers and peasants to sow, conserve, sell and exchange seeds be respected, and that they be consulted and participate in all ongoing policy negotiations pertaining to seeds, the patenting of life and intellectual property rights.

What can Canadians do to address global hunger?

Food experts agree that the solution to hunger is supporting local farmers and their access to seeds so that they can feed their communities. As part of one global family we can show this support through how we consume. Our buying habits can have a powerful impact on the lives of our sisters and brothers in the Global South and can send a strong message to politicians and companies that we want a food system that is healthy, sustainable and respects human dignity in all parts of the world.

Here are some simple changes that you can make that will have a big impact:



Buy locally-grown produce when in season. Your local farmers' market is the best place to start!



Purchase fair-trade products.



Buy organic foods. They are GMO-free.



Plant your own garden and experience producing your own food!

Urgent political action is also needed to tackle this challenge. Our elected officials need to be aware of the role of small family farmers in feeding the world, and in preserving global biodiversity. Once they understand this, they then need to consult with the small family farmers themselves, and involve them in all negotiations to ensure that Canada does not pass domestic laws or international bilateral trade agreements that remove the right of family farmers here in Canada and around the world to preserve and sow their seeds.

CONSULT OUR ACTION SHEET TO FIND OUT WHAT YOU CAN DO!

If you want to learn more, visit our website at devp.org/sowmuchlove for a list of additional resources.



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Photos: DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE
Design: Sherpa Design
Printing: AGL Graphiques
ED14-E4