TINEKE D´HAESE/VIA CAMPESINA

Food, Farming, and Justice

A role play on La Vía Campesina

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La Vía Campesina is arguably the largest social movement in the world. As of 2020, it comprised 182 local and national organizations in 81 countries, and represented about 200 million farmers. And yet, try finding a mention of La Vía Campesina in mainstream textbooks.

One of the reasons textbooks fail to include discussions of La Vía Campesina — and other social movements, for that matter — is because the publishers presume that change comes from the top. Textbooks teach students to look to Great Individuals, governments, corporations, multilateral organizations, the United Nations. According to the official stories offered in textbooks, power flows downhill, from the commanding heights. Another source of La Vía Campesina's invisibility is textbooks' core narrative — that humanity is in the midst of a pageant of progress, powered by science, technology, and capitalism. Peasants, by contrast, represent backwardness, pockets of ancient history waiting around in the countryside for the

beneficent arrival of the modern world.

This role play on La Vía Campesina challenges both these notions. Not only does La Vía Campesina's work call into question a future of corporate-dominated globalized markets and homogenized bigness, it has dramatically changed the global conversation about agriculture, food, and hunger as well. This role play allows for these vital conversations to occur in our classrooms. When they represent members of La Vía Campesina, students grapple with core issues that many in the industrialized West choose to ignore, or have never thought to question.

We designed this role play to teach some of the facts of La Vía Campesina, but in a way that invites students to "become" La Vía Campesina activists throughout the world, discovering differences, common circumstances, and shared objectives — and defining together what they mean by "food sovereignty," the animating principle of the organization. Through role play, students take on personas representing six of the many constituent organizations that make up La Vía Campesina: the Basque peasants union (EHNE); Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST); Haiti's Group of 4 and the Dessalines Brigade; the National Peasants Union of Mozambique; the Korean Women's Peasant Association; and the Tamil Nadu Women's Collective of southern India. Members of each group learn about one another in a mixer activity and meet some of the actual La Vía Campesina activists by viewing a film produced by the organization. They encounter an entirely different strategy to feed the world, one articulated by the world's wealthiest G7 countries. And finally, students propose and organize for alternatives to the G7 agricultural vision.

The role play helps students see that how we farm determines how we live. Food is about nutrition, no doubt, but it's also about community, public health, the climate, economic justice, jobs, and nature.

One final note: We taught this role play with 12 different classes — mostly 9th graders, but some 11th and 12th graders. (We've also used it in workshops with teachers and prospective teachers.) We revised and improvised as we went along. Thus, in the suggested procedure that follows, we occasionally offer different choices for how to proceed. We're confident that everything we suggest here "works," but we try to explain a bit about alternative ways to approach the role play. Special thanks to Matthew Plies, who taught the role play with his students and shared important insights with us.

Materials needed:

- "Facts on Food, Farming, and Hunger" — enough for every student in class.
- Construction paper for making name placards, one for each of the six groups.
- Colored markers.
- Copies of each of the six La Vía Campesina roles — enough so that each student in a group gets a role sheet.
- "La Vía Campesina Mixer" questions — enough for every student in class.
- Recommended: Nametags for each student for the La Vía Campesina Mixer activity.
- Copies of "A Proposal to Feed the World" — enough for every student in class.
- Copies of "La Vía Campesina's Response to the G7's 'Proposal to Feed the World'" — enough for every student in class.
- Materials for students to make metaphorical drawings — colored pencils, markers, or crayons; blank 8.5- x 14-inch paper.

Suggested procedure:

1. Begin by telling students that they're going to be doing a role play on the largest social movement in the world. Ask for students' thoughts on what it might be. If they have not heard of La Vía Campesina, mention that it includes more than 160 organizations with a combined membership of 200 million people in more than 70 countries. If students have not heard of it, you might ask them why not. Why would a social movement representing so many small farmers all across the world not be more well known? If they have an assigned textbook, ask students to look in the book's index to see whether there is an entry for La Vía Campesina.

2. Tell students the role play turns on the question of how we are going to feed the world, given that the United Nations estimates that close to a billion people are chronically hungry. Distribute the student handout, "Facts on Food, Farming, and Hunger." Point out the

assignment to students: to read the facts and to come up with three things that strike them as interesting, surprising, or new; and to generate at least three questions that the facts leave them with. Ask students to complete this in pairs or threes, as it is best if students have a chance to consider the questions with partners.

3. In the full class, ask students to share thoughts about the "Facts" reading. Our students were especially struck by the contradiction that the world produces enough food to feed everyone on Earth one and a half times over. One student wrote simply: "If we produce so much food, why are children dying?" Another wrote: "Why can't we all share if we have enough for everyone and more?" Students were also puzzled by the huge amount of hunger in India even though India is the world's second largest grain producer. Next to these paired facts on the handout, one student wrote in the margins of his paper "WOT?" If students have done the Irish Famine Trial (at the Zinn Education Project website) they have encountered the stain of hunger amidst plenty — as the mostly absentee landlords in Ireland exported vast amounts of food during even the most deadly years of the famine.

   As for questions, some students were puzzled by farmers in Haiti burning huge amounts of Monsanto-donated seeds, even in the wake of the devastating earthquake. One student wrote, "I get that it's a social movement, but would you rather starve or stand up to GMOs?" Another asked, "Why don't we hear about La Vía Campesina in schools?" This is an activity that we hoped would alert students to a host of issues they would encounter in the role play. Our intent was to encourage students to make observations and raise questions, but not to answer them at this stage. Especially with respect to GMOs, they will return to this question later in the role play. (It's worth mentioning here that some background on GMOs is helpful to students as they engage in the role play. One film that we've found especially useful is *The Future of Food* (www.thefutureoffood.com). The entire film is worth viewing, but even showing the first 20 minutes or so offers excellent background on the issue of genetically altered food crops, and why farmers like those affiliated with La Vía Campesina would resist the introduction of GMOs.)

4. Project the names of the six organizations and introduce the role play to students. Tell them that each of them will portray a member of one of these organizations affiliated with La Vía Campesina. Tell students that they will learn about their organization and have a chance to meet with other members of La Vía Campesina from around the world. They have all traveled to a big meeting of the G7, a gathering of representatives of the world's seven wealthiest countries. This meeting will focus on the G7's plan to "feed the world," and La Vía Campesina has come to offer its counter-vision.

5. Divide students into six groups of roughly equal size. Distribute roles to each group — everyone in each group receives the same role. Ask students to read their roles carefully. Tell them that you'll be asking them to write an interior monologue from the perspective of someone in their organization, so they should take notes on whatever might help them to write — for example, what worries them, what hopes do they have, how have their lives changed in recent years, why is their organization important to them? Encourage students to read these out loud in the small groups, as both reading and hearing the role sheets will often help students internalize the life conditions of the individual they will be portraying. As students read their roles, distribute name placards and colored markers and ask students to write their group's name on them.

6. After students finish reading their roles, ask them to write an interior monologue. On occasion, students will simply re-copy much of what is in their role sheet. To avoid that possibility, encourage students to invent a family and to attempt to personalize the role with their hopes and fears, and with specific details, even stories, from an imagined life. It is often helpful to prompt students with

an example. Here is an excerpt you might use from an interior monologue one of our students wrote for the role of Haiti's Group of 4:

> My town was devastated by the earthquake exactly five years ago. My mother and father died, along with the lady who sold us salt and sugar, the man who gave my sister and me candy when we went into town, and many others…After our houses had been reduced to dust, and after our crops had been damaged beyond repair, Monsanto, the company of all evils, offered us a lot of seeds. But they were all hybrid seeds and covered in disgusting chemicals. We were working to rebuild and restart farming, but Monsanto felt the need to step in. The seeds were enticing. I quickly learned from other farmers in the Group of 4, however, that this was not a gift. It was a trap to get us to purchase patented seeds from Monsanto year after year. My older sister joined other Group of 4 members and burned the bag of seeds without a second thought.

Another student wrote from the standpoint of a member of the Korean Women's Peasant Association. In hers, she coined the wonderful phrase the "hope group":

> By joining this association, or what my grandchildren refer to as the "hope group," I will fight for my family and the rice fields I grew up on. I refuse to see the smoke of factories settle over my home. I refuse to have the bitter smoke bite away at my life.

7. Ask students to read aloud their interior monologues in their small groups. This helps work them into their roles and helps flesh out some of the issues that they'll be exploring throughout the role play.

8. Distribute the "La Vía Campesina Mixer" questions to every student. Tell students that they will be doing a mixer activity to meet other activists from La Vía Campesina organizations around the world. They will share experiences and discover commonalities and differences with other groups. Ask students to read over the handout and to put a check mark next to each question that may apply to their group and for which they would be able to offer information to representatives from other groups. (Recommended: As students do this, distribute the nametags and have everyone write their group name in large print.) Some instructions that we offer students prior to beginning the mixer sharing:

- The aim is to have conversations with at least one representative from each of the La Vía Campesina organizations. Students must use a different individual to answer each of the eight questions.
- Tell students this is not a contest to see who can fill these out the fastest, so they should take their time, have a substantial conversation with each individual, but remember that they can use only one individual per question, so once they have finished talking with someone, they should move on to another representative.
- This is a one-on-one activity. Discourage students from grouping up, which can lead to some students passively listening and copying down information they hear from others. Nor may students pass their role sheets to each other, as this is a conversation-based activity. It is also meant to be a lively, get-up-and-move-around exercise, so discourage students from remaining at their seats and waiting for others to come to them.
- Role plays can invite stereotyping. One way to reduce this possibility is to tell people not to adopt accents as they attempt to represent individuals in their groups.
- Throughout the role play, an important aim is for students to identify with the La Vía Campesina activists they represent. Occasionally, we hear students distance themselves from their characters, saying things like, "If I were this person, I'd. . . ." Remind students to speak in the "I" voice, as if they

are these individuals.
- Begin the mixer activity. In our recent experience teaching the role play, the mixer took at least 45 minutes.

9. Following the mixer activity, we asked students to pause and to write on three questions:
1. What are some of the problems and fears that farmers from around the world are facing?
2. What are some of the positive things that farmers in La Vía Campesina are doing around the world?
3. As you talked with people from around the world, what did you notice about how their lives were similar to yours? In what ways were their lives different from yours?

As we began our post-mixer discussion, one student commented on similarities he noticed: Everyone he met in La Vía Campesina was "worried about making food, not making people rich" — which seems a pretty astute summary of the movement's pro-community, anticorporate orientation. For the third question, one student addressed how all of them were similar: "We all want global help to stay local."

10. We followed the mixer activity by showing students a short (about 20 minutes) film, *La Vía Campesina in Movement . . . Food Sovereignty Now!,* which we found at the La Vía Campesina website (http://video.viacampesina.org). (The film is also available at the website in Spanish, French, and Portuguese.) It allows students to hear from a diverse array of La Vía Campesina members — including from some of the organizations that they represent in the role play — who offer their interpretations of "food sovereignty" and the aims of this mass movement. We asked students to listen carefully to these definitions and goals as they watched the film. The video introduces students to small farmers from around the world who are anything but the powerless victims they are often portrayed as. The individuals in the film are defiant, dignified, determined, eloquent, and organized. Students will not yet be familiar with every issue that is raised in the film, or every event or organization referred to, but our aim in showing the film was to help students imagine the kind of people that they were representing in the activity and appreciate what motivates them. And it did that. As one of our students commented after the film, "I loved how people work with each other and support each other, even though they are from different places all over the world." (See other La Vía Campesina videos at http://vimeo.com/viacampesina/videos.) Following the video, we asked students to write on the question "What does food sovereignty mean to these activists?"

11. Tell students that a G7 representative is coming to speak on the plan that the G7 has formulated to "Feed the World." In addition to offering a five-point proposal, the G7 will introduce its slogan at the meeting. In preparation for the meeting, tell students that in their group they should come up with a brief slogan that summarizes their perspective on food and agriculture. Afterward, they should write these on a large piece of paper and post them prominently on the wall, or attached to their desks. In our recent experience teaching this role play, students showed delightful imagination in coming up with slogans. These included: "Buy Local, Sell Local, Live Local"; "We Grow Our Own Power"; "Without Land There Is No Life"; "Mother's Earth Is for Us to Share"; "Fight for Fair Family Farms"; and the delightful "Food for the Many, Not for the Money." Prior to the arrival of the G7 representative, ask students from each group to share their slogans with the entire assembly. We told students that in a moment, they would hear from the G7 representative and that they should listen carefully to the presentation because afterward there would be time for questions and answers. We encouraged people to compare the analysis and proposals from the G7 with the specific information in their roles, information they had heard from fellow La Vía Campesina members, or material that they had encountered in the "Facts on Food, Farming, and Hunger" handout. We encouraged students to write their comments and questions on the "Proposal to Feed the World" as they listened to the G7 presentation.

12. Distribute a copy of the G7 "Proposal to Feed the World" to every student. The teacher plays the G7 representative. When we made our presentations to the classes that we worked with, we left the classroom for a moment to re-enter as the G7 representative and took our place at the podium and thanked the assembled members of La Vía Campesina for agreeing to hear our plan. We began by highlighting the G7 slogan — one we invented for them, but apt — "Science+Investment+Free Trade= Prosperity." With some pomp, we read the "Proposal to Feed the World" aloud, stopping occasionally to emphasize a point.

13. No doubt, the G7 proposal is a lot to throw at students all at once, but we wanted them to see that all these components are part of a "neoliberal" strategy that places its faith in the so-called free market. Following the presentation, we told La Vía Campesina members that there would be a brief period of time to discuss the G7 proposals but that they should first turn to other members in their group or to others sitting around them and talk about what they thought of the five points in the G7 proposal and to brainstorm questions or comments they might want to make. The back-and-forth with students following the G7 presentation was one of the most spirited parts of the role play. La Vía Campesina members peppered the G7 representatives — us! — with questions and criticisms. In several classes, students drew on information in the "Facts on Food, Farming, and Hunger" to challenge the entire premise of the G7 proposal, that the root of hunger is not enough food in the world. "The problem isn't that there is too little food," one student said. "It's that people are too poor to buy the food. Nothing in your plan changes that, so people will still go hungry." You should conclude this back-and-forth while students are still full of questions and challenges for the G7 representative, as you'll want for this enthusiasm to carry over into coming up with an alternative response.

14. After the G7 presentation, ask students to write for a few minutes on "How does your vision of food sovereignty differ from the G7 proposal?"

15. Following the meeting with the G7 representative, we distributed "La Vía Campesina's Response to the G7's 'Proposal to Feed the World.'" In the 12 classes we taught this to, from this point forward, we took different paths. One route is simply to have students use these questions as a guide and to have each organization articulate some of the main planks or demands they propose to counter the G7 proposals. Another is to convene a La Vía Campesina meeting and to have the full assembly tackle each of these five questions one at a time. Each separate organization group could go over these one by one prior to convening as a whole group. To simulate the democratic processes — and difficulties — La Vía Campesina encounters in real life, you might remove yourself as teacher from this discussion, and let students fashion a process to make the decisions on their own. Whichever method you select, the idea is simply that students should attempt to develop an alternative to the free market vision of the G7. In each of our classes, students anticipated many of the real-world positions of La Vía Campesina — as well as the underlying cooperative, anticapitalist ethos of food sovereignty. As one student began the discussion: "If you're trying to end world hunger, you don't do it by trying to make money."

16. After students finished their responses to the G7 proposals, we asked them to think about how their alternative plans might go beyond food. We asked them to complete these statements:

- Our plan addresses the climate crisis because…
- Our plan creates more jobs because…
- Our plan is better for people's health because…
- Our plan is more likely to prevent people from being forced to move away from their homes because…
- Our plan helps reduce the huge gaps between the world's rich and poor because…

Students were astute in recognizing

how knitted together all these issues were. One student noted, "Our plan addresses the climate crisis because if we buy more locally, the need to use gas and other fuel would be reduced because we wouldn't have to ship many things across the globe. Also, we want to use agroecology more, which does not need fertilizers and chemicals to grow things." Another student addressed the migration issue: "When corporations come in and seize land, they often need large tracts of land to support their huge moneymaking enterprise. This will force small farmers off their land, like it did the Korean Women's Peasant Association. La Vía Campesina wants to ensure that all people are guaranteed the land they currently own, and the right to work their land and uphold their livelihood."

17. We concluded our La Vía Campesina unit by asking students to create metaphorical drawings — drawings that symbolized some aspect of the food sovereignty struggles that we had studied, and to write short explanations of their drawings. This assignment elicited an explosion of creativity. We were struck by how many student drawings focused not only on global exploitation, hunger, and the poisoning of the planet for profit, but also on the hope they found in La Vía Campesina's organizing and resistance. One image depicts a globe with stick figure people holding hands. A flaming Monsanto stands at the top of the world. The student's explanation reads: "Monsanto (alone) standing, separating itself from the world. The yellow in its flames represents greed. The orange represents power above others, because orange doesn't rhyme with anything and works alone. Red represents force, with which they pirate farms. The people are small farmers, all holding hands because they are connected and connected to the Earth." Another student's drawing echoes this theme, and celebrates La Vía Campesina's accomplishment of uniting farmers across nationalities and languages. It shows a world map with people connected continent to continent by lines and listening devices. On the lines are written phrases like "organic," "independence," and "food sovereignty." The student's explanation: "This drawing represents the interconnectedness of La Vía

Campesina. The way that people connect with each other through the same cause, despite their language barriers, is something truly moving. The supporters of La Vía Campesina are able to build ideas and new ways of living from each other and even fight for the same change throughout the world to end hunger. People reach globally to keep things local." Another drawing features a single sprout, being watered from above. The student's caption: "The sprout in the center represents food sovereignty because it is growing (and a growing concept) that is good and will thrive. The water that is perpetrating this idea is La Vía Campesina because it is a huge group and is clean and natural, and is trying to purify their place. Also, the sprout is a plant that is growing, making food for the locals."

18. One adaptation that we have made in workshops, where we have less time, is to ask participants to follow the G7 presentation by preparing for a demonstration to protest the G7's GMO-friendly, free market approach to agriculture. We ask them to make placards in their La Vía Campesina groups featuring slogans and images that embody their critique of the G7 proposals and that express their alternative visions for "feeding the world." This is a playful activity that mirrors the in-the-streets activism that is so much a part of La Vía Campesina's organizing.

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As we introduce students to the intertwined environmental and social crises that afflict the world, it's important that at the same time we introduce them to the social movements that address these crises. La Vía Campesina strikes us as one of the most significant of these social movements. We wrote the role play because we are encouraged by La Vía Campesina's vibrant, democratic challenge to the corporatization and homogenization of our global food systems. The movement makes it clear that a system based on maximizing profit will never produce sustainable or equitable solutions to food crises and hunger. But the groups affiliated with La Vía Campesina don't stop with critique; their brilliance shows in the hundreds of examples of farmer-run collectives around the world, providing communities with everything from seed banks to education in the innovative adaptations that farmers are developing in response to a quickly changing climate.

La Vía Campesina's responses to the many global crises are dispersed and distinctly local — rooted in the knowledge of particular communities and the context of specific places. This contrasts with the solutions offered by multinational agribusiness corporations like Monsanto that are the same everywhere, like the genetically modified crops that "resist drought," whether in the Midwestern plains of the United States or the northern plains of India. These may be marketed as solutions that will "feed the hungry," but at the end of the day they are simply a means to make money.

As La Vía Campesina points out, the market regards food as a commodity and delivers it only to those with the means to pay. But like the atmosphere and clean water, food is a collective human right — something the market can never adequately provide. Social movements — not free markets — are what secure and expand our rights. And that's perhaps the most important lesson that students can take away from the La Vía Campesina role play: the necessity of collective action in response to social and environmental crises.

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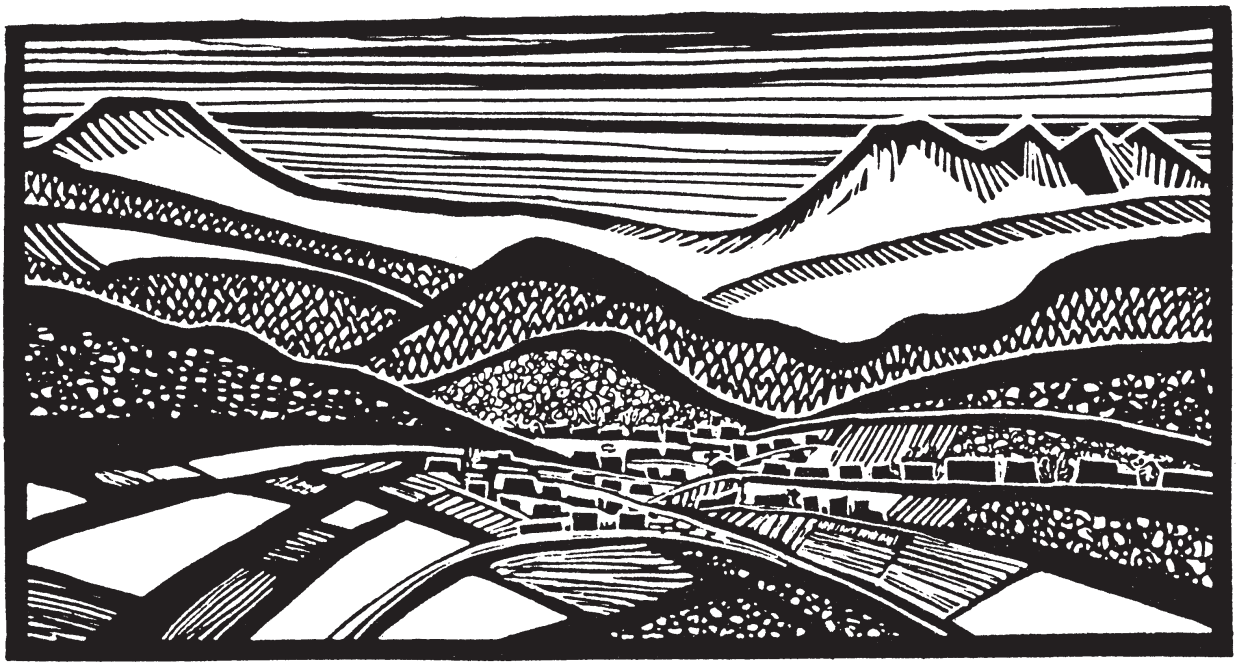
Handout

Facts on Food, Farming, and Hunger



RINI TEMPLETON

Assignment: *Read the facts below, and come up with at least three things that strike you as interesting or surprising — or that you had not known before. Come up with at least three questions that these facts leave you with.*

- The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 870 million of the world's 7.1 billion people suffer from chronic undernourishment — that's about one out of every eight people in the world.

- In the United States, 16.7 million children (about 22.4 percent) live in households that are considered "food insecure" — that is, families that don't always know where their next meal will come from.

- There is enough food produced to feed everyone on Earth. In fact, the world produces enough food to feed more than one and a half times the number of people on the planet.

- World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, even though during that time the population has grown 70 percent.

- There is no relationship between population density and hunger. The Netherlands, with very little hunger, has 401 people per square kilometer. Brazil, with a relatively high rate of hunger, has 23 people per square kilometer. India, with a great deal of hunger, has 369 people per square kilometer. South Korea, with relatively little hunger, has 487 people per square kilometer.

- Every day, almost 16,000 children die from diseases caused by malnutrition. That's one child every six seconds.

- One-fifth of all the hungry people in the world live in India.

- India is the world's second largest grain producer.

- Of the arable land in Mexico, 88 percent is used for the cultivation of export crops and grazing of cattle. Every year, almost 2.5 million acres of land used to grow food crops for local consumption is transferred to plantation crops — almost all for export.

- The Mexican government admits that at least 7 million people in Mexico suffer from a combination of extreme poverty and malnutrition.

- Half of the world's corn, 90 percent of the world's soy, and about 25 percent of the fish caught each year is used to feed livestock and farmed fish.

- Of all the privately held land in the world, nearly three-quarters is controlled by just 2.5 percent of all landowners.

- More than half of the rural population in the Third World is landless.

- In Bangladesh, almost 80 percent of the people work in agriculture, but they own only 5 percent of the country's land. In the United States, just 4 percent of the landowners own 47 percent of U.S. farmland.

- Almost half of the world's population lives in rural areas and grows their own food.

- Worldwide, women make up more than 50 percent of the agricultural workforce. In rural Africa, women produce about 80 percent of the food grown for domestic consumption. Yet they receive less than 10 percent of the loans provided to farmers and own only 2 percent of all farmland.

- More than 1 billion pounds of pesticides are used on crops on farms in the United States every year. About 5.6 billion pounds are used annually throughout the world.

- In the 1940s, U.S. farmers lost 7 percent of their crops to pests. Since the 1980s, this crop loss has increased to 13 percent, despite the vast increase in the amount of pesticides used on farmland.

- Since 1945, between 500 and 1,000 pest and weed species have developed pesticide and herbicide resistance.

- Just four multinational corporations — Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer, and DuPont — control half of the world's seeds.

- After the massive 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Monsanto announced what one company representative called "a fabulous Easter gift" to Haitian farmers: 60,000 sacks of hybrid corn seeds and other vegetable seeds.

- On June 10, 2010, about 10,000 farmers in Haiti marched three and a half miles to a town in central Haiti to protest what they called Monsanto's "deadly gift" of hybrid seeds treated with poisonous fungicides.

- La Vía Campesina is a social movement of small farmers around the world. It has a membership of 182 organizations in 81 countries. It is considered by many to be the largest social movement in the world, representing 200 million people.

Sources: Why Hunger?, Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy, UN Food and Agriculture Organization, La Vía Campesina, World Hunger Education Service, *Population in Perspective: A Curriculum Resource, The New Internationalist.*

RINI TEMPLETON

Basque Union of Small Farmers and Ranchers (EHNE)

You live and work in the Basque region of Spain, on the border between Spain and France. Although the Basque Country — called *Euskal Herría* — is technically a part of Spain, Basque people have always considered themselves independent of Spain. Your language is the oldest language in Europe. In 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, the Basque village of Gernika (Guernica in Spanish) was the first place in Europe to be bombed by the Nazis. Spain's dictator, Francisco Franco, outlawed your language; people were forbidden to speak, write, or sing in the Basque language. But your people resisted. Today, the Basque region is still being invaded, but it is a different kind of invasion.

There are about 6,000 farmers in EHNE. You are small farmers, farming an average of about 15 acres. It's difficult, but you love it. With mountains and streams and greenery everywhere, could anyplace be more beautiful, more peaceful? Cities are fine — to visit — but it's here in the countryside where you want to raise your children. On your farms, you have some kiwi trees, and you also grow peppers, tomatoes, corn, cabbage, lettuce, and onions. Some farmers raise cattle and sheep for meat, as well as for dairy products like milk, cheese, and yogurt.

But what farmers in EHNE really "grow" is health and community. EHNE was one of the first organizations in the world to use the term "food sovereignty" — that communities have the right to control decisions about the food they grow and eat. The campaign slogan you used with community members was "Produce local, eat local. It's good for you, it's good for us." Small farmers came together in EHNE to support one another and to provide an alternative to the big Walmart-like supermarkets that seem to be spreading everywhere. The food in these stores is grown by corporations on huge farms, with herbicides, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers. It's trucked in from hundreds or even thousands of miles away. It's not healthy food and the long distance the food travels contributes to climate change because it needlessly uses fossil fuels.

All over the world, huge corporations are trying to invade our lands and control our food. But EHNE — along with other farmer organizations in La Vía Campesina — are fighting back. In the Basque Country, small farmers have partnered with community members, who agree to buy a weekly basket of food from local farmers. This way, consumers know who grows their food, and they can trust that it was produced healthfully, without poisons or GMOs — genetically modified organisms. Your organization also offers help to young farmers, to try to keep young people on the land, so they don't have to leave the countryside to go to the cities. The big supermarkets try to push the little stores out of business. But EHNE refuses to sell to the big stores. EHNE sells only to local small markets, restaurants, and community food cooperatives.

EHNE is also fighting another kind of land grab in the Basque Country. The Spanish government is building "bullet" trains throughout the countryside. Small farmers won't benefit from trains that will speed through your land going as fast as 150 miles per hour. In order to build the railroad, the government has seized land from small farmers. In one local election, 98 percent of the people voted against the new high-speed trains. The government paid no attention, and took almost 40 acres of land away from six farm families. In another community, the government took 125 acres from 10 cattle farmers. You need this land for farming and to keep young people from leaving your communities. Who benefits from this so-called development? Only wealthy people, who are in a big hurry, and the corporations that make tens of millions of dollars building the railroad.

EHNE demands food sovereignty. Food ought to benefit farmers and community members, not profit-hungry corporations. Small is good. Local is good. Organic is good. Cooperation is good. Greed is bad.

Landless Workers Movement of Brazil (MST)

Seeds, soil, water, and sunlight — these basic ingredients of nature have allowed farmers to subsist from the Earth for thousands of years. Your Indigenous ancestors in Brazil used the land to grow crops like peanuts, sweet potatoes, and corn, but with the arrival of Portuguese colonists in 1500, the land was stolen from Indigenous people. Land became owned by a small group of wealthy elites, in massive estates.

Brazil still has one of the highest rates of land inequality in the world — the wealthiest 2 percent of the population owns about half of the nation's farmable land. To fight this unequal land distribution, you and thousands of other peasant farmers organized in 1985 to create the Landless Workers Movement (MST in Portuguese). The MST's strategy is to "take back the land" for poor farmers through land occupations and court battles, in order to win legal rights to unused farmland. After years of struggle, MST farmers have won rights to millions of acres of land. Your organization is now the largest social movement in Latin America.

Land occupations focus on large, private land holdings that aren't being fully used. In fact, Brazilians have a constitutional right to challenge ownership of any land that is not "fulfilling its social function"; at least 80 percent of the land must be used effectively, and environmental and labor standards respected. The occupations are difficult and dangerous, with occupiers facing threats and violence. Court battles can take years to win the legal right to the land. But out of this struggle, MST occupations have led to successful, worker-run cooperative farms that provide living wages for workers and use environmentally sustainable farming practices.

The Brazilian government supports huge farms and multinational agriculture corporations that export products like soybeans, coffee, sugarcane, ethanol, and beef around the world. This "get big, or get out" model of farming hurts small farmers like you. Wealthy farm owners and foreign agriculture corporations get richer, but it's become almost impossible for small family farms to survive. As a result, more than 25 million Brazilians — 14 percent of the population — suffer from hunger.

Brazil's changing climate is also making life more difficult for small farmers. The *Nordeste* region, where you are from, is a good example. Despite the dry, semi-desert, families like yours have lived and farmed in this region for centuries, planting crops that grow well with the yearly cycles of drought and rain. But in recent years, the droughts last longer and when the rains finally come, they result in massive flooding. Many farmers have given up and moved to the cities, usually landing in the slums.

But your community of MST farmers is showing that there are more positive ways of doing things. MST farmers are developing new farming techniques called "agroecology," which work with the droughts and floods in the region. By using ditches and underground dams, farmers have developed new ways of "harvesting" water during the rainy season, to help keep soils moist and fertile during droughts. MST farmers avoid chemical fertilizers and pesticides by using diverse crop groupings that include fruit trees, corn, ground cover crops, and climbing vine crops. This crop combination creates a lush forest-like environment that naturally builds the health of the soil — reducing the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The MST can help spread these sustainable farming practices around Brazil, but it will take government support — financial support for water storage technology and real land reform. In your own region, you can see the difference that land reform makes. Agroecology systems take three to five years to establish, and are usually practiced only when MST farmers have won the right to land they actually own. The same farmers use conventional methods (field burning and heavy use of chemical pesticides) on land that is merely occupied by the MST, because they can't count on having the land in the future. By fighting for land reform and government financing for agroecology, the MST can help millions of Brazilians return to the land and use sustainable, small-scale farming to preserve the land for future generations.

Group of 4 and the Dessalines Brigade, Haiti

You live in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. You are members of the Group of Four (G4) and the Dessalines Brigade. In 2007, four of Haiti's largest peasant organizations came together to form an alliance to promote sustainable farming practices and advocate for the rights of peasant farmers. The Dessalines Brigade was created between Haitian and Brazilian farmers to show that a solidarity exchange is possible between peoples, not just between governments and corporations.

Your entire history is farming. Prior to the European conquest of Haiti, the Taínos, the Indigenous people, practiced a diversified agriculture that provided food for all and was ecologically responsible. Your agricultural practices are also influenced by West African farming traditions called *Konbit,* brought over by enslaved Africans that emphasizes cooperation over competition. Difficult farming tasks that require many people — such as planting seeds, clearing a field, or harvesting crops — are done by asking friends, family, and neighbors to lend a hand. This work is filled with singing, joking, feasting, and lots of hard work. Today, two-fifths of all Haitians still make their living from the land and agriculture accounts for roughly a quarter of Haiti's total economy.

In January of 2010, your country was devastated by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake that killed an estimated 320,000 and displaced more than 1.5 million Haitians. In the years following the earthquake, Haiti was hit by a cholera epidemic, and several tropical storms damaged infrastructure and made farming more difficult. Following this disaster, Monsanto, a multinational seed corporation, donated more than $4 million worth of non-native hybrid seeds. They said, "[I]t was clear a donation of our products — quality corn and vegetable seeds — could really make a difference in the lives of Haitians."

You were skeptical. La Vía Campesina, an international movement you belong to, has called Monsanto one of the "principal enemies of peasant sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty for all peoples." Monsanto sells hybrid crops that do not produce seeds that can be saved for next season. All over the Global South, Monsanto attempts to talk farmers into using the seeds, and traps farmers into purchasing them year after year at outrageous costs and under their conditions. Monsanto also owns almost 650 seed patents and has sued small farmers who have accidentally grown their seeds when they migrated from farm to farm. In addition, these hybrid seeds are covered in chemicals. The seeds donated to Haiti were treated with two fungicides called Maxim XO and thiram. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says that these chemicals are so dangerous to farmers that they need to wear special gear to protect themselves from being poisoned. The EPA also banned these products for home garden use because most homes do not have the safety equipment to properly use the seeds.

Although the government and wealthy Haitian elite accepted these seeds, you rejected them. Thousands of you marched to protest Monsanto's increasing presence in your country and you burned the donated seeds as a symbol of your rejection. You called this seed donation by Monsanto "a new earthquake" and "a very strong attack on small agriculture, on farmers, on biodiversity, on Creole seeds…and on what is left of our environment in Haiti." You know that the future of Haiti depends largely on local production with local food for local consumption, what you call food sovereignty. One farmer said, "People in the U.S. need to help us produce, not give us food and seeds. They're ruining our chance to support ourselves." Monsanto's donated seeds and arrival in your country is a direct threat to this.

National Peasants Union of Mozambique (UNAC)

You live in Mozambique, a country in southeastern Africa, and are members of UNAC, the National Peasants Union of Mozambique. You are farmers. In fact, four out of every five people in Mozambique are farmers — that's about 15 million. To know something about farming in Mozambique you have to know about how the Portuguese colonized your country for hundreds of years, stole your land, and enslaved your people. The Portuguese forced your people to grow non-food crops like cotton and sisal to export — which benefited the Portuguese but no one else. Because your land was stolen, many Mozambicans, especially men, left the country to work in the gold and diamond mines in South Africa.

After a long war, your people drove the Portuguese out and finally, in 1975, Mozambique became independent. Independent, but poor. This was the start of a difficult period, but for once, Mozambique was for Mozambicans. As one farmer put it, "It was the first opportunity when people were feeling that we have lives, we are independent…We can determine our own future without interference from outside." The new revolutionary government took all the land back from the Portuguese and declared that the land was now owned by the people, and that everyone in Mozambique had a right to land and to farm. To you, landownership is a sacred right of all Mozambicans. It's right there in Article 109 of your constitution: "As a universal means for the creation of wealth and of social well being, the use and enjoyment of land shall be the right of all the Mozambican people."

When the Portuguese ruled your country, they wanted cash crops to be grown only for export. But now, farmers like you try to be self-sufficient, and grow all the food your community needs to survive: fruits like papaya, oranges, and coconuts; everyday food crops like maize (corn), peanuts, and beans. You also raise cows, goats, chickens, and ducks. You practice what UNAC calls "agroecology." That's a fancy way of saying that you don't want to use pesticides and chemical fertilizers, which are expensive and can also poison your food, animals, and water, and hurt the soil. You value the traditional farming knowledge passed down through generations — including saving and sharing seeds among different communities, rather than importing seeds from other countries. As UNAC says, "Peasants are the guardians of life, nature, and the planet."

UNAC connects hundreds of "associations" of farmers in Mozambique — and around the world, through La Vía Campesina, the peasant movement you belong to. The UNAC associations are like cooperatives where people help each other out. Sometimes they work each other's land together, or share their resources. If farmers in the association produce more food than the community needs, then they sell these products and use the proceeds to buy a truck or improve the community's school. UNAC also brings farmers from Mozambique together to share their knowledge and learn the stories of other peasants from around the world. UNAC pressures the government to offer loans to farmers, or "infrastructure," like irrigation or better roads.

UNAC has also organized farmers to resist the attempts of big foreign companies — and your own government — who are coming in to steal peasants' land. For example, a huge program called ProSavanna — a partnership between the governments of Mozambique, Brazil, and Japan — that would seize 34 million acres from peasants and turn the land over to corporations to grow cash crops like soybeans, sugarcane, and cotton. These are not to feed your people but to export, to make others rich. Their idea is that the peasants who will be thrown off the land can get jobs working on the cash crop plantations. Not only will these enterprises steal farmers' land, but they will also poison your water with chemical pesticides and fertilizers. This whole scheme feels like colonialism, and UNAC and farmers all over Mozambique are fighting these unconstitutional land grabs.

The goal of UNAC is to create "dignified and lasting livelihoods" and to produce "high-quality foods in sufficient quantities for the entire Mozambican nation." Under colonialism, Mozambique's exports were high. But Mozambicans starved. You will not allow that to happen again.

Korean Women's Peasant Association

In Korean folklore, the mung bean, or *nokdu,* represents the resilient spirit of the Korean peasants. Under even harsh conditions, *nokdu* sprouts and grows, feeding you when you need it most. You are deeply concerned with Korea's future and the future of the Earth, but like *nokdu,* you are resilient. You are part of the Korean Women's Peasant Association, with 30,000 members, and you are fighting for women farmers of South Korea. You are also affiliated with La Vía Campesina, the movement of small farmers around the world.

Shintobuli — a Korean proverb — says, "Your body and Earth are not two different things." How you, as women peasant farmers, live, shows this. In addition to housework, women have traditionally been responsible for everything to do with food: managing and sowing seeds, harvesting, storing, processing, and cooking food for your family. But the way you have lived is changing.

After the Korean War ended in 1953, the United States pushed Korea to become more industrial. This rapid industrialization in Korea has had big effects on you. The number of farmers declined from 50 percent of the population in the 1970s to 7 percent in the 2010s. More than one-fourth of the farmland disappeared to make way for the booming technology industry. Many Korean farmers quit farming because they could not make money from products they grew — in part because of cheap imported food from the United States — and flocked to the cities looking for work. This resulted in slums and urban sprawl.

But not everyone sees this as a problem. Huge Korean corporations, or what you call *chaebols,* have benefited greatly. The top 30 *chaebols* account for 82 percent of your country's exports. They want to control all food in Korea for profit, while opening up opportunities for the tech industry in farming. If South Korean *chaebols* and the politicians who represent them had their way, you, and most other farmers, would all but disappear under the logic that your farming practices are "uncompetitive" in the global marketplace.

The *chaebols* want free trade agreements with the United States and other industrialized nations. They argue that these agreements will strengthen global demand for Korean high-tech products. But you can't eat technology. These agreements, like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Trans-Pacific Partnership, benefit the *chaebols*, but not small farmers like you. You and other Korean farmers oppose these agreements, because they open Korea up to cheap imports and give more control of agriculture to rich corporations. In protest, you have taken to the streets. You feel that an industrial food system in Korea has hurt women farmers like you. Other small Korean farmers are also speaking out. Lee Kyung Hae even committed suicide by stabbing himself in the heart while protesting the WTO in Mexico because of its devastating impacts on small Korean farmers. Lee said that the "WTO kills farmers," because the "free trade" pushed by the WTO forced Korean farmers to compete with rice produced by huge agribusiness farms in the United States and apples grown with incredibly cheap labor on Chinese farms.

Fortunately, the Korean Women's Peasant Association has helped create a movement to eat local food. You have created an agricultural supply chain that connects women peasant farmers in the countryside with consumers in the city. Your food is grown without pesticides, herbicides, GMOs, or other chemicals. You farm *with*, rather than *against* nature, like using sea snails to get rid of weeds in your rice paddy fields. You have also created "common cafeterias" where women farmers can eat the food you all grow instead of buying food from *chaebol*-owned restaurants. This allows you to sell and share food from *your* farms to people in *your* community and not support the people who are wrecking your way of life.

You are unwilling to accept a food system where the *chaebols* control all the food — one that is industrialized, chemical-dependent, energy-intensive, and benefits only the rich. You want a food system where you consume what you produce in your local community. How you farm promotes sustainability, equality, and community. All this is under threat and you will not accept this fate.

Tamil Nadu Women's Collective

Drought has parched the land in Tamil Nadu, the southern state in India where you live. The seasonal monsoon rains have disappeared, yet another victim of climate change. That, combined with the many Coca-Cola plants that draw vital irrigation water from the Tambirabarani River, leaves village wells dry. Farm production has dramatically decreased. You cannot water your crops with Coca-Cola.

You also face pressure from another multinational corporation, Monsanto, which has purchased seed companies in India, and now uses the same historically known brand names to deceive farmers, getting them to purchase their genetically modified seed. The Indian government has approved Monsanto's Bt cotton for commercial use. It tempts men all over India. They hope to provide for their families with seeds designed to withstand drought and pests, increase yields. But these seeds are expensive.

Farmers can borrow from a bank to buy the seed, but many cannot, and turn to unscrupulous money lenders who lend at high rates with a farmer's land as collateral. However, these genetically modified crops often fail. Then the farmers are unable to pay back the loans. Some men leave their villages to find work in the cities; others, in acts of desperation, commit suicide. In India today, one farmer kills himself every half-hour.

Tamil Nadu is different; in part, because of you. The Tamil Nadu Women's Collective is an organization of more than 100,000 women in 18 different regions and 1,500 villages throughout Tamil Nadu, striving to empower the most vulnerable in India today: women. You especially organize those who are divorced or widowed, and the *dalit* — the so-called "untouchables."

Proudly, as part of a GM-free campaign, the Tamil Nadu Women's Collective has educated people about the impact of genetically modified crops on the land and people. Few men here fall prey to the empty promises offered by Monsanto for Bt cotton. More importantly, the state of Tamil Nadu has banned field trials of genetically modified food crops.

As a woman, you have always been the actual farmer; 80 percent of women in rural India are. On your farm, you and the other women in your family do most of the work: you plant, thin, water, harvest, and store the crops; without you, there would be no crops. Men deal only with cash crops, like cotton or soya.

Many men in Tamil Nadu have resisted genetically modified seeds. However, they continue to seek a profit in cash crops using hybrid seeds and chemical fertilizers and pesticides, advertised to increase the seeds' production — even in drought conditions — on land that could be used for food crops. Hybrid seeds cannot be saved; they are often sterile or produce plants unlike the parent plant. You worry. Once again, you see famers becoming dependent on seed companies, spending money they do not have on seeds and chemicals, chasing a dream of abundant crops.

That is why the Tamil Nadu Women's Collective is returning to what leading seed activist and sister Indian, Dr. Vandana Shiva, calls "the gift of the seed from the Earth and our ancestors."

Your collective is focused on shifting land use from cash crop to food crop cultivation, and planting traditional, native food crops such as millet and pulses (beans and lentils), crops that need little water and are so well suited to regional conditions that they require no chemically based fertilizers or pesticides. Women farmers are now able to feed themselves more than 15 days a month from your own crops. One goal of the collective is to guarantee members two meals a day without having to borrow.

Companies like Monsanto, through GMO or hybrid seeds, prevented your self-sufficiency. Now, you can save your own seed, reserving part of the crop to plant the following year. You have even created seed banks, where women share seeds from different crops, ensuring the preservation and biodiversity of traditional food crops. You feel more independent, more powerful. By returning to traditional crops and farming practices, the collective is protecting the Earth and the seed she so generously provides.

Handout

La Vía Campesina Mixer

Find a different person to answer each of these questions. You must talk to at least one individual from each of the five other La Vía Campesina organizations.

1. Find someone whose organization has taken direct action against a multinational corporation. What group does the person belong to? What action did the group take?

2. Find someone who is concerned about the takeover of farmland in this individual's country. What organization does the person belong to? How is farmland being threatened and what is the organization doing about it?

3. Find someone whose organization is practicing "agroecology." What organization does the person belong to? What does agroecology mean to this person and what steps is the organization taking to bring it about?

4. Find someone whose organization has an opinion about seeds. What is the organization, and why does this organization focus on seeds? What actions is the group taking — or has it taken?

5. Find an individual from a group that organizes women farmers. What specific issues affect women in this group's country? What steps has the organization taken to help women farmers?

6. Find a person from a country that once was colonized by a European country. What is the country? How was the country affected by colonization and how does it still affect farmers in this country today?

7. Find a person from an organization that is working for more local solutions to feeding people in its country. What is the organization? How is this organization working for more local solutions?

8. Find a person from an organization that has demanded changes from a country's government. What is the organization and country? What demands has this organization made of the government?

Handout

A Proposal to Feed the World — From the G7

Experts predict that the world's population will reach 9 billion people by 2050. If we are to feed everyone, we will need to double the amount of food we produce today.

Together, we can do it.

Leaders of the G7 countries — the world's most developed and wealthy economies — want to work with you, the small farmers of the world.

Leaders of the G7 countries — the world's most developed and wealthy economies — want to work with you, the small farmers of the world.

All countries need to be full partners in the global economy. As the global economy expands and reaches more of the world's people, poverty will turn to prosperity.

Here are the major parts of our vision:

1. **Huge new investments from private corporations will help modernize agriculture, develop underused land, and help farmers get their crops to global markets.**

   Multinational corporations like Cargill, Monsanto, and Dreyfus can introduce advanced plant breeding, biotechnology, and improved farm management and marketing practices.

2. **All countries must eliminate any restrictions on private foreign investments.**

   Private investors need to be able to launch large-scale agricultural projects, if they are to demonstrate the newest, most productive farming techniques, and produce vast quantities of agricultural products for the global market. Examples of new projects include large-scale production of soybeans, sunflower oil, cotton, bananas, and maize (corn); pig barns for pork production; or crops for biofuels or animal feed. These operations create jobs for individuals who may lose their farms as the land is put to more productive uses. It's essential that countries eliminate all barriers to private foreign investment, if everyone is to benefit from the global marketplace.

3. **Tariffs on imported agricultural produce must be eliminated.**

   Some countries have high tariffs to keep out agricultural products from other countries. Tariffs on agricultural goods must be eliminated so that every country can be brought into the global market. Farmers — especially small farmers — have the right to compete in a market of 7 *billion* consumers, rather than the few million in just their own country. Consumers have the right to buy the cheapest food available, even if it was not produced in their home country. If tariffs are eliminated, foreign investment in agriculture will increase and everyone benefits.

4. **Private seed companies will provide the world — at reasonable prices — the most productive, high-yielding quality seeds. Thus, countries must offer protection to private seed companies in order to gain access to these benefits.**

   This would include recognizing and enforcing all patents on seeds, especially genetically modified seeds, which require huge private investments and need to be protected. There should be no restrictions on the use of scientifically tested seeds.

5. Governments must end subsidies to farmers and let the free market work to make farmers more productive, to double agricultural output, and to reward those farmers who are most productive.

Too often, governments subsidize unproductive farmers by offering irrigation assistance, marketing help, cheap loans, or other supports. Government has a role to play, but it cannot take sides in favor of smaller, unproductive farmers and against larger, more productive farmers.

We are at a crossroads in world history. As the population booms and as the climate changes, we will either feed the world, or we will see hunger and misery increase. But this is unnecessary. Science and technology can lead the way. We can have a world of abundance, a world of justice, a world of freedom. Let us seize the moment.

Handout

La Vía Campesina's Response to the G7's "Proposal to Feed the World"

As members of La Vía Campesina how do you respond to the five-point proposal from leaders of the wealthy countries? As the world's largest social movement of small farmers, La Vía Campesina needs to decide what you think of these proposals, and come up with an alternative "Plan to Feed the World," if you oppose any of these proposals.

1. The G7 countries propose that "huge new investments" from private corporations and help getting your crops to global markets will improve the lives of small farmers. Do you agree? If not, specifically, what things will help small farmers? Come up with at least three proposals.

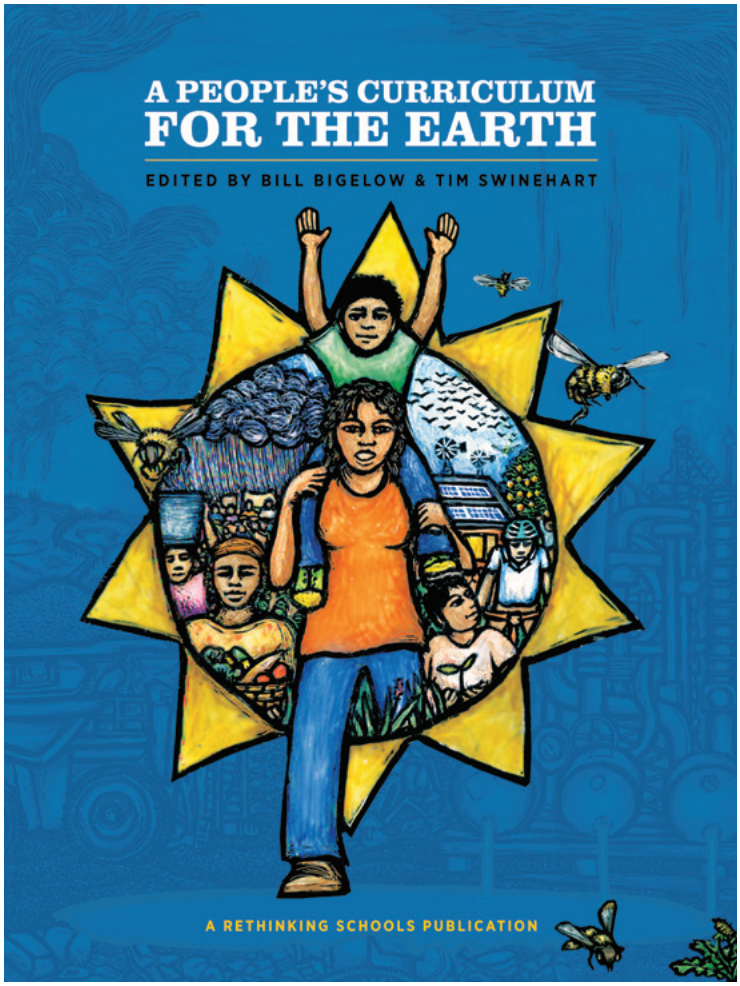
2. The G7 countries propose eliminating all restrictions on private investment in your countries. Should these restrictions be eliminated? If not, what kind of restrictions or rules should be put on private investment?

3. The G7 countries propose eliminating agricultural tariffs on produce. Do you support this? If not, what kind of tariffs or other restrictions should be placed on imported food?

4. The G7 countries insist that countries must respect patents on seeds, not restrict the use of genetically modified seeds, must not give seeds away to farmers, and must allow private inspections of farms. Do you agree? If not, what should countries' "seed policy" be?

5. The G7 countries call for the elimination of government subsidies to farmers. Do you agree? If not, what kind of support should governments provide to small farmers?

This lesson comes from the Rethinking Schools book, ***A People's Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis***. The book includes more than 80 additional environmental justice lessons and student-friendly readings, for elementary through college. Go to www.rethinkingschools.org/earth to see the table of contents and to read the book's introduction.



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