



## **Food Otherwise Manifesto**

### ***Towards fair and sustainable food and agriculture systems***

*It is high time for a transition in the current food and agriculture systems in the Netherlands, in the European Union, and around the world. In February 2014 the first Dutch/Flemish Food Otherwise [Voedsel Anders] conference took place. At this conference, held at Wageningen University, a wide range of initiatives and currents converged. For two days eight hundred people exchanged ideas and experiences, which led to the following vision and action points. This vision is the basis for the Food Otherwise Movement in the Netherlands and Flanders.*

#### **Our vision**

The Food Otherwise Movement strives for sustainable food and agriculture systems to manage soils, landscapes, plants, animals and water responsibly. We are working towards food and agriculture systems in which farmers and citizens have a greater voice. We want fair, remunerative prices for farmers everywhere in the world, as well as plentiful, nutritious food for everyone. This involves working towards food sovereignty as well as food security.

Food Otherwise is a diverse social movement comprised of groups and individuals who differ in strategy, ideas and history, yet the principles of this manifesto unite us. We build bridges between many initiatives for fair and sustainable food and agriculture systems. When possible, we work towards common viewpoints and activities. We connect with food movements in other countries and regions.

## Why do we need a different food system?

Two billion people in the world today are malnourished, as a result of both systemic hunger and unbalanced diets. At the same time 500 million people suffer from obesity. It is particularly tragic that the majority of the malnourished are food producers living in rural areas. That is not the only paradox; hunger and malnourishment are still leading causes of death, although there is more than enough food available in the world to feed everyone. Roughly one third of all food produced is wasted, and that which is produced is often insufficient in quantity or diversity to allow for healthy diets for the local population.

Caught between expensive suppliers, low and unstable prices for their crops and toiling on land that produces less and less, many farmers around the world have stopped farming. In the Netherlands six or seven farmers quit farming every day. The countryside is being taken over by a handful of agricultural entrepreneurs who “modernize” their production by enlarging their farms, embracing new technologies, and using as little labour as possible. In developing countries, many farmers feel forced to move to the city to search for employment which is often unavailable, leaving them to live in poverty in slums.

Industrialised agriculture is responsible for a substantial percentage of total global greenhouse gas emissions, which in turn lead to climate change. Furthermore, soil life, and consequently the fertility of the soil, is affected by the long-term use of chemicals, and many soils around the world are either exhausted or contain an excess of nutrients. Both the surface water and the groundwater have become polluted and (agricultural) biodiversity has decreased at an alarming rate. Health risks, such as resistance to antibiotics, are inherent to intensive agriculture. Although high environmental, animal welfare, and public health standards are set for farms in Europe, these standards have come under pressure from free trade agreements such as the TTIP agreement with the United States.

### ***The Netherlands and Flanders in the global food system***

*The Netherlands is the second biggest exporter of food, agricultural and horticultural products in the world, and Flanders is heavily involved in the exportation of these goods as well. More than three quarters of these exports, mainly transit goods, stay within the EU. Exporting countries are particularly vulnerable to geopolitical, economic and climatic fluctuations elsewhere in the world.*

*As a result of intensive arable farming, horticulture and floriculture, The Netherlands, Belgium and Japan lead the world in production per hectare, as well as in the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides. This has serious consequences for the natural environment and public health.*

*Livestock farming has also intensified dramatically. The Netherlands has become the most livestock-dense country in the world, and this has increased the risk of disease. In the course of the past fourteen years more than 40 million animals were destroyed in order to prevent swine flu, bird flu, foot and mouth disease, BSE or Q-fever from spreading, partly to safeguard export interests. In some cases strains of these diseases have developed that pose a serious risk for humans. Animal transport across long distances increases the danger of diseases spreading.*

*These intensive forms of agriculture and livestock farming also have negative effects in the global South. Dutch and Flemish livestock farming is heavily dependent on soy imports from South America. Large-scale cultivation of soy as a monoculture often involves land grabbing, deforestation and heavy use of chemical herbicides. Similar problems occur in connection with the cultivation of palm oil and biofuels for the European market. Furthermore, these agricultural products are shipped across long distances, breaking the nutrient cycle. This leads to the exhaustion of soils in the South and nutrient excess in the North.*

## **How did we get here?**

Current agricultural policies focused predominantly on productivity and specialisation promote monocultures, the use of artificial fertilisers and agrichemicals, and long-distance transport of agricultural products. The situation has worsened since the neoliberal reforms of the nineties, when agriculture was included in free trade agreements. Due to the global application of free market principles, “the lowest price” has become the decisive factor in agriculture.

However, for several reasons free market theory is not applicable to agriculture. Farmers cannot possibly compete with each other globally, especially since production conditions vary too greatly from region to region. The strength of a farm does not lie in exports but instead in production for local and regional markets. However, because free trade agreements do not allow governments to apply national standards regarding the environment and animal welfare to imported goods, there is unfair competition with local farmers, who must comply with these standards. In this way it becomes impossible for these local farmers to receive a fair price for food produced sustainably. Moreover, farmers in the global South are forced out of their own local and regional markets by the dumping of subsidised products from the North.

Because of the rising global demand for animal feed and agrofuels, many small-scale farmers are losing their land and their livelihoods. Land grabbing, the occasionally violent but always involuntary displacement of local users of land by governments and investors, has increased substantially. Millions of hectares have been sold or leased to international investors in developing countries and Eastern Europe.

Finally, citizens and farmers have a continually diminishing say in what they produce and consume. Some twenty transnational corporations now control the global agriculture and food system. The seeds, grains, processing, and supermarket sectors in particular are dominated by just a few multinationals. Targeting the whole world for production and distribution, these multinationals have an interest in open borders and few regulations. With their economic and political power, they largely control not only the agriculture and food markets but also the direction of research, agricultural policies and agricultural legislation. These multinationals decide, to a great degree, what farmers produce and what citizens eat.

## **Food otherwise, other food**

All over the world people realise that this cannot continue. Many innovative farmers are opting for fair and sustainable methods of production and for different crops. In this way they are increasing both their income and their autonomy, and introducing new life into their soils. Citizens are coming together around healthy food and urban gardens or starting food co-ops together with local farmers. Many people, including politicians and civil society organisations, are campaigning for more just trade, investment, and competition policies. There are researchers who are responding to farmers' needs, exchanging and building knowledge together with them. Everywhere in the world people and movements are standing up for the right to food, water and free seeds.

The 'Food Otherwise' movement unites many of these individuals, organisations and networks in their efforts to develop fair and sustainable food and agriculture systems. There are different ways in which this can be (and indeed is being) put into practice. In the food movements in the Netherlands and Flanders, and elsewhere, we see this happening in four main areas:

### **1. Agroecology**

### **2. Regional food systems**

### **3. A fair trade and agriculture policy**

### **4. Land rights and land governance**

These areas complement each other and together they form our vision of fair and sustainable food and agriculture systems.

**Agroecology** is both an ecological and a social approach to agriculture. It refers to a set of agricultural practices but is also a science and a social movement. Agroecology seeks ways to use local means of production, relationships, and knowledge for resilient and productive agriculture. The approach is based on cooperation with nature – for example by closing water and nutrient cycles as much as possible – on the free exchange of seeds among farmers, and on ecological practices instead of the use of chemicals (such as chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides). Agroecology prioritises the use and development of local knowledge, means and networks. This reduces farmers' dependence on external inputs and increases their control and autonomy. Agroecological systems are also climate resilient because new forms of cooperation and innovation result in crops and practices that are better adapted to a changing climate, and because the use of fossil fuels is reduced as much as possible.

Agroecology has developed into a worldwide movement. Agroecological policies now receive wide recognition and are put into practice by farmers in cooperation with others, especially citizens and scientists. They include initiatives originating in organic farming, permaculture, urban agriculture and movements for food sovereignty. The development and strengthening of agroecological practices in cooperation with farmers, is also attracting increasing attention from policy makers and scientists.

**2. Regional food systems** and agroecology reinforce each other. Short production chains for example in the form of farm shops, vegetable box schemes and farmers' markets, make the link between farmers and citizen stronger and more direct, require less transportation (and thereby potentially reduce CO2 emissions), and generate better coordination between producers and consumers, resulting in less food wastage.

In short, in regional food systems farmers and consumers have more say in the price and quality of their food. There is also more space for farmers, citizens, institutions, firms and local governments to develop their own initiatives and to cooperate, taking sustainability and animal welfare into consideration. Urban agriculture plays a crucial role, particularly in rapidly expanding cities in Africa and Asia, as a practical way for poor populations to obtain a fresh and nutritious diet. Examples of this in The Netherlands and Flanders are community gardens and school gardens. Consolidating these developments in an urban food strategy has proven to be very effective.

**3. A fair trade and agriculture policy** would ensure that farmers receive stable, remunerative prices and that citizens pay a price in which all the environmental, social, and animal welfare costs have been included. When markets are regulated, regions such as the EU can be much more self-sufficient and produce their own food, feed and other agricultural products. This would put a halt to both the dumping of European surpluses and the use of significant amounts of land outside of Europe for cultivation, of animal feed in particular, for European use. In this way, farmers in developing countries would regain access to both their land and their markets for local food production, which would make a major contribution to food security.

Agreements for a more regulated form of international trade should replace the current free trade agreements. Ideally, this would be a system in which farmers and citizens have more say in food and agriculture, replacing the current economic and political dominance of large corporations. Human rights, including the right to food, the protection of (agricultural) biodiversity and the climate, and the sustainable use of land and water should take precedence over trade and investment interests. Governments should reclaim the policy space to take measures that guarantee healthy, sustainably produced food.

**4. Land rights and land governance** are crucial prerequisites for people who depend on local natural resources. Farmers, pastoralists, fishermen and hunters (often indigenous peoples) need to have access to and control over land, water and forests, as well as to the genetic diversity of livestock and seeds. This is particularly important for women and youth. It should be noted that natural resources are not to be regarded only as means of production but also as habitats, landscapes, and providers of ecosystem services, with respect for the holistic view of the relation between people and nature in different cultures. It goes without saying that the natural resources mentioned above should be primarily used to feed the local population and not to produce export crops, cultivated by large-scale farmers/ agribusinesses, or to extract fossil fuels or minerals. In Europe it is difficult to find land for young people who are eager to start growing "local" food in an agroecological way. Some private initiatives are already trying to accommodate them, but governments also have an important role to play in this field.

## Working together towards the transition

In this way we work towards a transition in practice, in science, in policy and in society to develop food and agriculture systems that are sustainable and fair all over the world, in which farmers and citizens have more say, and where their knowledge and creativity are used and their values and aspirations are leading. We do this for the sake of the climate and nature, and for the sake of all the current and future inhabitants of this world.

*This manifesto was endorsed by the following organisations (last updated 17 August 2015).  
Would your organisation like to join the list? Send an email to [manifest@voedselanders.nl](mailto:manifest@voedselanders.nl)*

Atlantis Handelshuis  
Action Aid Nederland  
ASEED  
Bioforum  
Both ENDS  
Brabantse Milieufederatie  
Down2Earth  
Duurzaamheidsdialoog  
ETC Nederland  
FIAN  
Food Quake  
Greenpeace  
Gouden Pompoen  
Help Humus  
HIVOS  
ICCO  
ILEIA  
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