

Double food production with agroecological farming

A United Nations report published March 8 2011 tells how: Agroecological farming can double food production within 10 years, while mitigating climate change and alleviating poverty. The annual report to the UN's Human Rights Council, by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Olivier de Schutter, urges policy support for and investments in agroecology. For further discussion of agroecology see: <http://www.panna.org/science/agroecology>

Download De Schutter's 20-page report, where compelling evidence is presented, from: <http://www.srfood.org/index.php/en/component/content/article/1-latest-news/1174-report-agroecology-and-the-right-to-food>

Summary of the evidence

To feed 9 billion people in 2050, we must urgently adopt the most efficient farm systems and techniques. Scientific evidence shows that agroecological methods outperform chemical fertilizers in boosting food production where most of the hungry people live — especially in harsh environments.

Agroecology will raise productivity at the farm level, concludes the report, and also help farmers adapt to and mitigate climate change, conserve biodiversity and promote soil health. It can also create jobs, increase incomes, diversify diets, improve nutrition, and bring farmers and communities together.

We cannot continue with resource intense industrial agriculture that will increasingly rely on scarce and costly inputs, contributes to climate change,

and is not resilient to climatic shocks. It is not the best choice as oil and phosphates are depleted and the climate changes.

Evidence in favour of agroecological farming, by contrast, is very solid. De Schutter says a large segment of the scientific community now agrees that agroecology has positive impacts on food production, poverty alleviation and climate change mitigation — and this is what is needed in a world of limited resources.

Agroecological projects have shown an average crop yield increase of 80% in 57 developing countries, with an average increase of 116% in all African projects. Recent projects conducted in 20 African countries showed a doubling of crop yields over a period of 3-10 years.

Rural Success = science + farmers

This new report confirms findings from other comprehensive and rigorous studies eg: the UN & World Bank-led International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) and the UNEP UNCTAD report on organic agriculture and food security in Africa. Both concluded agroecology and organic farming offer potent solutions to global hunger, water scarcity, rising fossil

fuel-based energy costs and climate change. Governments are very slowly embracing agroecological methods but to progress they must support participatory farmer-scientist partnerships that aim to develop innovative science and practical systems for ecological methods. De Schutter's report details the many concrete and convincing examples of successful agroecological farming systems.

Good news around the world

- Tens of thousands of East African farmers are adopting the “push-pull” method of ecological pest management in corn which uses intercropping to repel insect pests and suppress weed populations, while naturally increasing nitrogen in the soil, doubling yields, providing fodder for cattle and increasing milk production and household income.
- Malawi is shifting towards agroforestry as an exit strategy from its massive chemical fertilizer subsidy program. Like Cameroon, Malawi is training farmers to plant nitrogen-fixing trees which can double or triple yields, reducing dependence on costly chemical fertilizers, while building up soil health;
- In Japan, China, India, Bangladesh and the Philippines, farmers are integrating ducks and fish into rice systems and enjoying benefits of natural insect and weed control, improved nutrient cycling, reduced labour needs and extra animal protein for families.
- Agroecological practices are also being adopted in “developed” countries such as Germany, France and parts of the United States.

Too important for markets to decide

For agroecological farming to fulfil its potential to feed the world while conserving life-supporting ecosystem functions on the planet, governments will have to provide resources. These are public sector investments, and the job cannot be left to private industry.

Agroecology is a knowledge-intensive approach. It requires public policies supporting agricultural research and participatory extension services. States and donors have a key role to play here.

Clearly referring to major biotech and pesticide companies that dominate agriculture’s political landscape, de Schutter warns that private companies will not invest time and money in practices that cannot be rewarded by patents and which don’t open markets for chemical products or improved seeds.

The US government will claim that “private-public partnerships” with Monsanto and other giant agribusinesses — such as those recently announced by USAID — are a better way to go and that, in any case, it’s too expensive to change course.

But another UN report: Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication at <http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/> by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) refutes this. It argues that investing just 2% of global GDP from now till 2050 can kick-start a transition to a really sustainable, low carbon, resource-efficient economy. Investing in “green agriculture” will create 47 million more jobs and bring higher returns than conventional farming. Green agriculture also creates “positive externalities” like those that De Schutter describes.

**Humanity can build and fund a sustainable future.
We must change, fast, to secure food sovereignty!!**