



For Immediate Release

October 1, 2020

Contact:

Jordan Treakle, 202-543-5675, jordan@nffc.net

Ahna Kruzic, 510-927-5379, ahna@panna.org

U.S. Farmers Call Out U.S. Ambassador for Pushing Agribusiness Agenda and Attacking Agroecology at the United Nations

A national alliance of farmers, workers, and fishers says agroecology and the human right to food are needed now more than ever to stop climate change and ensure that everyone has access to healthy, nutritious food

The U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA), a network of 50+ grassroots organizations and grassroots supportive organizations, has just published an open letter denouncing the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (U.N.) Agencies for Food and Agriculture, Indiana agribusiness baron Kip Tom, for his unprecedented attacks on *agroecology* - a science, practice, and organizing tool for farmers and food producers that bases food production on ecological principles - and on the U.N. itself. In its letter, the USFSA asserted that food producers around the world and in the United States need agroecology to support their communities, protect the planet, and ensure everyone has access to healthy food.

Ambassador Tom asserted in a speech to the US Department of Agriculture in early 2020 and in a recent editorial that agroecology is “anti-science,” and he has made fear-mongering comments that hunger and poverty will be much worse if farmers stop using the toxic pesticides, genetically modified seeds, and expensive machinery and technologies that are controlled by agribusiness.

“Ambassador Tom’s disdain for agroecology reveals that he indeed has a minimal understanding of the concept of agroecology,” said Patti Naylor, a farmer from Iowa who represented the USFSA and the North American region at the U.N. Committee on World Food Security (CFS) for when it discussed agroecology in 2019, where she met Ambassador Tom. “Agroecology is not simply a set of farming practices but instead comes out of people’s movements, in which social commitments and political education make agroecology the pathway to food sovereignty. All of this is a threat to the power and influence of a global agrifood industry. The Ambassador’s role at the U.N. is to defend and expand the dominance of the agrifood industry, but his task is becoming more and more difficult as the global health pandemic has revealed a fragile food supply chain, dependent on the exploitation of people and nature.”

Ambassador Tom also blames a key U.N. agency, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) whose governing committee endorsed agroecology two years ago, for being “against American values” and used his history growing up on a family farm to posture as if he represents the interests of family farmers. Ambassador Tom now operates agribusiness firm Tom Farms, which manages 25,000 acres in the U.S. and Latin America and produces seed for companies like Bayer-Monsanto and Syngenta.

Member organizations of the USFSA denounced Tom for attempting to speak for American family farmers and food producers, the majority of whom want and demand agroecology, food sovereignty, and the human right to food.

“Most farmers in the world do not farm 20,000 acres like Mr. Tom, nor would they want to,” said Jim Goodman, retired dairy farmer from Wisconsin and current President of the National Family Farm Coalition. “Farmers want to farm within their means, matching their local context and diets. The Green Revolution, which Mr. Tom says we need instead of agroecology, has played havoc with people's lives and the environment across the world.”

Goodman added that practitioners of agroecology embrace science and technology but ensure that they serve farmers, workers, and all food producers by prioritizing greater social equity, the restoration of ecosystems, and more sustainable food systems and trade and by making research and development processes participatory, collaborative, and community-based.

Jennifer Taylor, an organic family farmer, Associate Professor at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, and one of the national coordinators of the USFSA, said that “agroecological farming systems promote soil fertility, soil and water conservation, biodiversity, healthy environments, mitigate pest damage and climate change. Agroecological practices develop sustainable farming systems that benefit our communities by generating employment, providing essential services, and distributing healthy produce.”

Taylor also noted that organic farmers “support the avoidance of synthetic hormones and antibiotics, and we oppose the use of sewage sludge, irradiation, GMO/genetic engineering materials, and GMO agricultural strategies. Some of our key practices include: growing a healthy farm through gaining knowledge to support what grows best in our farm environment; building healthy soils, selecting organic seeds and transplants, integrating mulches, crop rotations, cover crops; compost use; enabling pollinator and beneficial insect habitats; selecting viable locally adapted varieties; and seed saving.”

The USFSA also issued a strong repudiation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s decades-long support for extractive, “fencerow-to-fencerow” agriculture and a pro-agribusiness “get-big-or-get-out” policy framework. These policies have pushed millions of family farmers out of business and have polluted and poisoned rural communities. The USFSA called for systemic changes in U.S. food and agriculture policy and a Green New Deal that centers the needs and voices of frontline communities and is based in environmental and climate justice.

Finally, the USFSA denounced the long history of the U.S. government disrupting and obstructing democratic policy-making at the United Nations and in other countries and selling out rural and urban communities in favor of transnational corporations. The letter calls on Ambassador Tom to support democratic U.N. processes and to listen to U.S. food producers, not U.S. agribusiness corporations, and support agroecology. “Family farmers, food and farm workers, and rural communities need to be at the center of policy-making, especially at the global level,” said Tristan Quinn-Thibodeau, national campaigner with ActionAid USA and part

of the USFSA's International Relations Collective. "U.N. spaces like the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) center the 'holders' of human rights - the frontline, grassroots communities who are entitled to human rights - and so it is critical that governments and all stakeholders prioritize and protect the participation of grassroots organizations, especially from communities that have been historically excluded."

"The conflict between the corporate model of agriculture - based on profits - and agroecology - based on the human rights, the rights of peasants, the protection of nature, and food sovereignty - will determine the kind of world we will leave the next generations," said Patti Naylor. **"Agroecology is the only choice that can support farmer livelihoods and meet the challenges of climate change, food insecurity, and environmental collapse."**

The full letter can be downloaded [HERE](#).