

US Farm, Food and Trade Justice Advocates Call on Biden Administration to Reorient Approach to Global Food and Agriculture Issues

October 13, 2021

To: Mr. Joseph Biden, US President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500,
United States

cc: Secretary Vilsack, US Department of Agriculture
1280 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC
United States

cc: Secretary Blinken, US Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC
United States

cc: Ms. Jennifer Harhigh, Chargé d'Affaires, ad interim
U.S. Mission to the UN Agencies in Rome
via Boncompagni 2
Rome, Italy

Dear President Biden,

As our communities continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing hunger and poverty, and the existential threat of climate change, we thank you for your administration's efforts to re-commit the United States to international cooperation and multilateralism to address these challenges. But, we, the undersigned 67 U.S. civil society, food producer, and environmental organizations write this to express significant concern about your administration's direction on critical international food and agriculture policy priorities.

We urge you to direct all relevant U.S. federal agencies and government officials to fundamentally reorient the U.S. government's approach to global policy development on food and agriculture issues, breaking with the U.S. government's historical alignment with corporate agribusiness and neoliberal, unregulated trade orthodoxy. In particular, we call on your administration to mandate a new policy direction for U.S. government engagement with the United Nations Committee on the World Food Security (UN CFS) and the three Rome-based food and agriculture agencies. This urgently needed reform must prioritize the rights and livelihoods of workers, food producers, and frontline communities, ensure food security through food sovereignty in the U.S. and abroad, while mitigating climate change, restoring biodiversity, and addressing corporate power in global food systems.

Over the past 18 months, the COVID 19 pandemic has revealed painful truths about the fragility of the corporate food sector in the U.S. In response, your administration has made some important investments and policy directives on local food systems and family-scale food providers, decentralizing food supply chains and the agricultural processing sector, strengthening competitiveness and anti-trust standards, and promoting racial equity in the U.S. food system. There is still much work to be done to truly transform and strengthen our food systems, but we applaud these initial efforts. But we are also dismayed that your administration's efforts on these critical issues have not extended beyond our national borders and are not being reflected in U.S. government policy positions in multilateral policy spaces.

The UN food and agriculture agencies and policy fora, including the UN CFS, are critical spaces for technical, logistical, and financial support to small-scale food producers worldwide, but also political dialogue for inclusive policy development. The CFS in particular, addresses some of the most challenging and central issues facing rural communities, and develops policy guidelines and scientific research for national governments through an inclusive process that provides producers, workers, and other frontline constituencies an autonomous and institutionalized 'seat at the table,' therefore providing critical political legitimacy to this multilateral space.

For too long our constituencies' needs and interests have been unrepresented, unsupported, and undermined by the U.S. government in these policy-making spaces, as the U.S. government has promoted a policy agenda that reflects the narrow interests of the corporate agribusiness sector. Over the last four years, the U.S. delegation to the UN food and agriculture agencies has been openly defiant and obstructionist of the CFS policy processes, damaging not only the reputation of the United States but also the integrity of important global policy instruments. The Trump Administration's Ambassador to the UN agencies for food and agriculture issues was particularly divisive, attacking civil society organizations, government representatives, and the UN itself, while U.S. officials undermined support for small-scale producers, local and regional markets, community food systems, ecologically-based farming, and human rights standards. This pro-corporate agriculture agenda must change under your watch.

In-line with your administration's public commitments on human and worker rights, racial and gender justice, trade reform, and addressing the climate crisis, we call on you to direct USDA, the State Department, and other relevant U.S. government agencies and representatives to take the following measures in regard to engaging the UN fora dedicated to food and agriculture issues:

- **Human rights:** Clearly demonstrate the U.S. government's dedication to supporting civil, political, social, economic, cultural rights as the basis of all U.S. government policy positions. In particular, we call on the administration to articulate its commitment to advancing: food workers' rights, as enshrined in ILO Convention 98; Indigenous People's right to sovereignty and self-determination as enshrined by ILO Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); the rights of peasants and other rural peoples, as enshrined by the UN Declaration on Peasant Rights (UNDROP). Furthermore, we call on the Biden administration to work with Congressional leaders to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (which

enshrines the Right to Adequate Food, Right to Water, and Right to Health) and develop federal implementing legislation for this critical human rights framework.

- **Racial Justice:** Clearly demonstrate the U.S. government's dedication to supporting racial justice in agriculture, in both U.S. domestic and foreign policy, by explicitly strengthening the rights and livelihoods of communities of color, regardless of nationality and geographic location, in UN food and agriculture policy negotiations. This commitment should not be limited to the amount of resources allocated for economic development, disaster relief, or material goods, but should first and foremost focus on leveraging public policy to advance the rights, representation, agency, and sovereignty of communities of color to achieve their self-determination.
- **Address the climate, biodiversity, food and water crisis through agroecology:** Clearly demonstrate the U.S. government's dedication to a new direction when it comes to food system sustainability. We call on the Biden administration to publicly commit to supporting agroecology in the U.S. and abroad in specific alignment with 10 elements on agroecology developed by FAO (endorsed by the UN CFS in 2021 and by the FAO Agriculture Committee in 2018), and 13 principles developed by the High-Level Panel of Experts (2019) of the UN CFS.
- **Trade:** Publicly commit to a comprehensive review of how U.S. food and agriculture trade policy can advance a rights-based Just Transition, given the multiple crises we have in the global food and agricultural systems. Furthermore, the administration should refrain from trade challenges to other countries' efforts to advance food sovereignty, the Right to Adequate Food, biodiversity protection, and confront climate change. Finally, we call on the Biden administration to engage civil society organizations of this letter and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food on how to both leverage and reform U.S. trade policy to strengthen the Right to Adequate Food and other international human rights frameworks.
- **Strengthen participatory, multilateral policy-making:** Clearly demonstrate the U.S. government's dedication to democratic policy-making in international fora by establishing an institutionalized, transparent, and equitable mechanism for U.S. agencies to solicit public comment from U.S. constituents on U.S. government priorities in international food and agriculture policy negotiations. Furthermore, we call on the Biden administration to take decisive action to strengthen the authority, legitimacy, and inclusive, participatory, and consensus-based processes of the UN Committee on World Food Security. Finally, we urge the Biden administration to institutionalize basic transparency and public disclosure procedures for U.S. officials and diplomats' engagement with corporate agribusiness representatives.

We need transformative change, and a significant reorientation of U.S. government approach to policy development and multilateralism in the UN to protect our food systems from the climate and biodiversity crises and ensure an end to hunger globally. In re-entering the global community, the U.S. should fully support the UN system as the best hope for international cooperation towards shared goals. We look forward to your action on this matter.

Sincerely,

- A Growing Culture
- ActionAid USA
- Agricultural Justice Project
- Agroecology Research-Action Collective
- American Sustainable Business Council
- American Jewish World Service
- Caribbean Agroecology Institute
- Center for Biological Diversity
- Center For Food Safety
- City Compost
- Climate Justice Alliance
- Common Ground Farm, Inc.
- Community Alliance for Global Justice
- Community Garden Connections
- Community to Community Development
- Cooperative Development Institute
- Cornucopia Institute
- Corporate Accountability
- Cultural Arts Coalition
- Ecological Farming Association
- Fair World Project
- Family Farm Defenders
- Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
- Farmworker Association of Florida
- Food and Water Watch
- Food Animal Concerns Trust
- Food for Maine's Future
- Friends of the Earth U.S.
- Friends of the MST (US)
- Grassroots International
- Greenhorns
- Grow More, Waste Less
- GROW North Texas
- Health Care Without Harm
- Hmong American Farmers Association
- Indigenous Environmental Network
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
- Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
- Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
- Land Stewardship Project
- Local Futures
- Lydia B Stokes Foundation
- Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
- Massachusetts Avenue Project, Inc.
- National Family Farm Coalition
- National Farm to School Network
- North American Marine Alliance
- Oakland Institute
- One Fish Foundation
- Oxfam America
- Parable of the Sower Intentional Community Cooperative
- Pesticide Action Network North America
- PODER
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Public Justice Food Project

- Rural Vermont
- Science and Environmental Health Network
- Seeds for All
- Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON)
- Sustainable Agriculture of Louisville
- Toxic Free NC
- Transformations CDC
- Until Justice Data Partners
- US Food Sovereignty Alliance
- Vermont Healthy Soils Coalition
- WhyHunger
- Women's Voices for the Earth