

World Trade Organization PRESERVING THE RIGHT TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Starting December 13, the representatives of the 149 member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) will meet in Hong Kong. Behind closed doors, they will discuss an agreement on agricultural trade, which could be crucial for the future of hundreds of millions of farmers around the world and for the right of peoples to food sovereignty.

On the eve of this meeting, as members of civil society concerned about the future of our farming, we forcefully reiterate our support for the inalienable right of peoples to food sovereignty, a right which ought to prevail over exclusively commercial interests. Citizens of every country in the world must have access to varied, quality foods, produced by a local agriculture that allows its artisans to obtain a just and fair income from the market.

In Quebec and Canada, we have adopted a **fair** farming model, supply management, that respects the principles of food sovereignty in dairy, poultry and egg production. This model is based on collective marketing and planning of production to adjust it to domestic demand. Put in place over thirty years ago, supply management is so relevant and fair that farmers in several African countries, in particular, want to adopt it and adjust it to their agricultural and social realities. But the WTO negotiations on agricultural trade today threaten its sustainability.

What are the advantages of supply management?

As consumers, supply management gives us access to quality foods, produced in our own country, in sufficient quantity at affordable prices. For farmers, it ensures a stable, decent, **fair** income, which comes entirely from the market, not from government subsidies. Our dairy and poultry farms shape our rural landscape and contribute to the wealth of our heritage throughout Quebec, from the Abitibi Region to the Gaspé. Milk, eggs and poultry, produced under supply management, are transported, processed, distributed and sold near the places from which they come, which reduces shipping distances and greenhouse gases. This model also avoids production of disruptive surpluses that would take up space on the international markets to the detriment of foreign farmers, especially those in poor countries.

The intensification of global agricultural trade, as advocated by the WTO, would push farmers in all countries – industrialized and developing – into savage competition and accelerated industrialization of our agriculture. We would lose a lot, both in terms of the quality and diversity of our food and in relation to protection of the environment and fairness for farmers.

Ten years of the WTO has done little to improve the situation of farmers around the world. One thing is certain – regardless of the country where they work, farmers over the past ten years have seen a gradual decline in the price of the food they produce and a dramatic drop in their income. The only real winners are the agribusiness multinationals, which deal on this scale. This is an untenable solution, which the WTO agricultural negotiations should correct.

For all these reasons, a few days from the 6th WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong, we believe that the agreement on agricultural trade absolutely must allow countries to maintain their food sovereignty by protecting their markets in commodities that are primarily intended to feed their own population. In keeping with this fundamental right of peoples to food sovereignty, we reiterate our support for the fair farming model that is supply management and urge the Government of Canada to do everything in its power to preserve it at the outcome of these negotiations.

Claude Béland
Associate Professor, École des sciences de la gestion, UQAM

Louis Bolduc
Assistant to the Canadian director, United Food and Commercial Workers (FTQ)

Claudette Carboneau
President, Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN)

Roger Carrette
Mayor, Ville de Saint-Georges-de-Beauce

Pierre Curzi
President, Union des artistes (UDA)

Alban D'Amours
President and Chief Executive Officer

Claude Faucher
Vice-President, Centrale des syndicats démocratiques (CSD)

Christian Giguère
Executive Director, Centre de développement pour l'exercice de la citoyenneté (CDEC)

Daniel-Mercier Gouin
Holder of the Chair for the analysis of the agricultural policies and collective marketing, Université Laval

Pierre Marc Johnson
Legal Counsel, Heenan & Blaikie

Roger D. Landry
Former President and Editor of La Presse

Gérald Larose
President, Groupe pour une économie solidaire du Québec (GESQ)

Dr. Michel Librowicz
Holder of the Philippe-Pariseault Chair for training in agri-food market globalization, UQAM

Réjean Parent
President, Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ)

Mgr Raymond St-Gelais
Bishop, Diocese of Nicolet

René Roy
Secretary General, Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)

Pierre Véronneau
Executive Director, OXFAM-Québec