

FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Intensive industrial agriculture can undermine human health and the integrity of ecological systems. The historical record suggests that people have traditionally used in the order of 10,000 species of plants for food, which maximizes nutrition. Today, only 20 major crops (primarily wheat, rice and corn) provide 90 percent of the world's dietary intake (The UN Commission on Sustainable Development, 2008).



In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture is becoming a predominately female activity as a consequence of male out-migration. Women now constitute the majority of small farmers, providing most of the labour and managing a large part of the farming activities on a daily basis (The Food and Agriculture Organization, 2002).

Agriculture is the most widespread use of water. Despite the critical role that women play in reducing food insecurity, through their knowledge of food production, local biodiversity, soils, and local water resources, they are often excluded from decision-making processes in new water management initiatives (The International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2007).

In North Africa and the Near East, 60-70% of all surface and groundwater is used for agriculture. Water demand is steadily increasing as a result, while water supply is steadily decreasing (The Food and Agriculture Organization, 2008).

In 2008, the Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that 1 billion people will face "dire food insecurity" over the next decade.



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Carlos Marentes of the Border Agricultural Workers Project says, "The current agricultural system destroys rural communities in the South, forcing millions to migrate, risking their lives at the border. Food sovereignty is our alternative. Instead of building walls, we should fight for healthy rural communities, so people can stay on their land, and produce their own food" ("Food Sovereignty," Grassroots International and La Via Campesina).

Emissions from agricultural activities alone account for 12-40 percent of current human-induced climate change (International Yearbook of Environmental and Resource Economics, 2001).

The best estimates for the loss of forests worldwide represents a parcel of land the size of Venezuela. Similar trends continue for the formation of deserts. This has a direct and destructive impact on our ability to produce food for a hungry world (Global Forest Assessment, 2002).

80 per cent of global carbon stocks are stored in soils and forests, and carbon released in them as a result of unsustainable agriculture and deforestation contribute significantly to climate change.

Organic agriculture is based on the effective management of local ecosystems involved in food production. Organic methods protect the environment and produce healthier food for several reasons: they reduce noxious chemicals that contribute to climate change; they store carbon in soil and build organic matter; and they minimize overall energy consumption by up to 70% (The International Organization of Agricultural Movements, 2010).



Some 20 percent of the world's dry lands are affected by human soil degradation, which puts at risk the livelihoods of more than 1 billion people (Global Environmental Outlook, 2008).

WHAT THE CHURCHES CAN DO

- Support local and regional farmers markets.
- Bring local farmers, especially women, to speak with your congregations, where they can describe their experience and express their concerns.
- Organize coalitions of farmers and church groups to educate the public and influence political decisions.
- Voice your concerns to government leaders about following the precautionary principle ("first, do no harm") in the use of genetically engineered seeds and pesticides.
- Encourage your church leaders to explore the relationships between poverty, human rights, and the environment.



BIBLE STUDY – FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

The Bible talks of living in harmony with the land and calls for justice so all people can have secure food supplies. God is shown caring for his people, providing food for life. Sharing food was central to Jesus' ministry. He used bread as the symbol of faith, giving life to body and soul. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61 to announce his manifesto, calling for freedom and justice as we turn to God. The 'year of the Lord's favour' relates to the Old Testament concept of a Jubilee year, celebrating God's graciousness to all and showing how humanity and creation must live in harmony to ensure sustainable food for all.

This Bible study is for use by small groups or individuals, to be adapted to your own context.

LUKE 4:16-19

Jesus went to Nazareth... He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

LEVITICUS 25: 10-19 – CELEBRATING THE JUBILEE YEAR

You shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants... you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces... You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God. You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely.

DISCUSSION

You may wish to open in prayer. Read the Bible passage twice and then discuss these questions:

In biblical times:

- What do you think these passages are about? Please retell them in your own words.
- What do we learn about God's care for the most vulnerable?
- What was the idea of the Jubilee year? How did this help people live in harmony with the land?
- How would these laws help communities to have better and fairer relationships?
- It is written in Leviticus 25: 23 that God says: "The land is mine; you are but tenants" What should this mean for how humans treat the land and each other?

In our own times:

- In what ways do bad or unjust relationships within and between human societies cause hunger in our world today?
- How do human actions damage our environment and lead to hunger?
- What would you put into a Jubilee law for today – so that we produce, consume, buy, sell and share food in a just way?
- What issues can we advocate for to gain reliable daily food for all?
- What is our prayer? What practical actions can we commit to take as individuals and communities?



PRAYER

Loving Father,

We thank you for your loving care for your people and all creation. Forgive us when we have failed to seek justice and allowed others to go hungry. Forgive us when we have damaged creation and created further poverty and hunger. Give us a hunger for justice, so that all may live in harmony with the land with food, dignity and justice for all.

In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

FURTHER PASSAGES FOR READING

Genesis 41

Exodus 23:11

Luke 12: 13-21

Matthew 6: 9-13

REFERENCES AND OTHER BIBLE STUDIES

Bible: New International Version 1979

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance:

www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/food/

www.arocha.org

World Council of Churches:

www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/eco-justice

www.ecocongregation.org

