



RECLAIM THE FIELDS

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Reclaim the Fields

We are a group of young peasants, landless and prospective peasants, as well as people who are taking back control over food production.

We understand “peasants” as people who produce food on a small scale, for themselves or for the community, possibly selling a part of it. This also includes agricultural workers.

We support and encourage people to stay on the land and go back to the countryside. We promote food sovereignty (as defined in the Nyéléni declaration) and peasant agriculture, particularly among young people and urban dwellers, as well as alternative ways of life. In Europe, the concept ‘food sovereignty’ is not very common and could be clarified with ideas such as ‘food autonomy’ and control over food systems by inclusive communities, not only nations or states. We are determined to create alternatives to capitalism through cooperative, collective, autonomous, real-needs-oriented, small-scale production and initiatives. We are putting theory into practice and linking local practical action with global political struggles.

In order to achieve this, we participate in local actions through activist groups and cooperate with existing initiatives. This is why we choose not to be a homogeneous group, but to open up to the diversity of actors fighting the capitalist food production model. We address the issues of access to land, collective farming, seed rights and seed exchange. We strengthen the impact of our work through cooperation with activists who focus on different tasks but who share the same vision.

Nevertheless, our openness has some limits. We are determined to take back control over our lives and refuse any form of authoritarianism and hierarchy. We respect nature and living beings, but will neither accept nor tolerate any form of discrimination, be it based on race, religion, gender,



nationality, sexual orientation or social status. We refuse and will actively oppose every form of exploitation of other people. With the same force and energy, we act with kindness and conviviality, making solidarity a concrete practice of our daily life.



We support the struggles and visions of la Via Campesina, and work to strengthen them among young European people. We wish to share the knowledge and the experience from years of struggle and peasant life and enrich it with the perspectives and strength of those of us who are not peasants, or not yet peasants. We all suffer the consequences of the same policies, and are all part of the same fight.

RTF: a quick review of the evolution and current questions

June 2007, anti-G8 mobilisation in Roctock, Germany. 1st youth assembly for the access to land and farming. About 80 people come for a two-hour discussion mainly on obstacles to starting farms in our different European contexts.

From there, a small group of young members of peasant organisations (POs) decide to start a process for "youth" inside the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC).

November 2007, Meeting in basq Country hosted by the PO EHNE. About 10 people sent by peasant organisations from different European countries come together and decide to organize a youth camp the following summer. Two meetings take place early 2008, in St Denis, France and Witzenhausen, Germany.

September 2008, "Farming a cool future" camp in Sweden at Holma farm co-organized by the youth of ECVC and Young Friends of the Earth Europe, in parallel to the European Social Forum. About 150 people join. The camp is focused on practical alternatives, like creating a consumer-producer cooperative, producing cheese, agroforestry, etc. Strong enthusiasm to go further together. Part of the people who want to join are not members of POs. We decide that it should

not be an obstacle.

October 2008, 5th Via Campesina international conference in Mozambique. 1/3 of delegates have to be young people. A good group of young Europeans join the Youth Assembly, including some who are not members of ECVC organizations. At the international level, it is decided to organize a youth gathering in 2010 in Spain.

November 2008, meeting in Belgium with about 15 people. Decision to take the name "Reclaim the Fields, Young Europeans walking with Via Campesina". We define "Who we are", "our values", "our goal" and "our activities" (this is all on www.reclaimthefields.org). We decide to organize a European camp in 2009 linked to the international Via Campesina gathering in Spain.

March, June, August 2009, three meetings to prepare the Cravirola camp, first in Wageningen (Netherlands), then Cravirola (France), then Geneva (Switzerland).

Between Holma camp and Cravirola camp, three "local" groups are created in Sweden, Switzerland and Belgium. They are all very different from each other.



October 2009, "Reclaim the Fields" camp in Cravirola, France, where about 400 people come together from a great diversity of European countries. A lot of workshops on starting a farm, access to land, alternative agricultural practices, collective dynamics, etc. On the last day, we have an assembly to decide what we can do together. A lot of people express the will to continue to work together.

Following the camp in Cravirola, new groups are born in several places in France, Norway and Hungary. There is also a strong interest in Germany and Spain. Some networks also show an interest for RTF, for example the network of cooperative farms LongoMai.

December 2009, mobilisations in Copenhagen, Via Campesina invite Reclaim the Fields to stay with them in a school and to take part jointly to the mobilizations. About 50 people join. The Swedish group Mykhoryzza organizes a soup kitchen with vegetables that they have grown together during the year: a great success. It's the first time that we take part in a big mobilization as a group, reclaim the fields, and also the first time that Via campesina and Reclaim the fields do something together. On the last

day, everybody is very happy about how it went (we were happy to be there together, sharing a lot of ideas and way of doing things) and on the relation with others (Via campesina, CJA).

Where we are and current questions

This process led people from different European countries to meet and to exchange ideas on starting a farm, collective dynamics, re-taking the control over food production, access to land, etc... Finding out that there are a lot of people all over Europe sharing the same dreams and anger gave us a lot of energy. This is the great strength of camps like the one in Cravirola, yet *if we repeat it won't we be bored? Isn't there the risk that it takes all our energy instead of working on more practical things?*

We have wanted to break the frontiers between professional farmers and those who produce food



to consume themselves, around the joint idea of collective re-appropriation of food production. We have tried to link urban gardens with peasant farms, consumers-producers initiatives with land squatters, etc. One important step for doing so has been to discuss a new definition of "peasant" not according to an official status but according to an activity of food production and link with a territory. It is still a challenge to work together in our diversity, between the "children of

farmers", environmentalists, autonomous people, those linked to peasant organisations and urbanites from collective gardens, etc. It's not easy, but it's certainly what makes reclaim the fields an interesting space. *How can we preserve this diversity?*

In the beginning, European Coordination Via Campesina did not quite understand this "youth group" which both wanted to be autonomous and to be linked with Via Campesina. The decision to take the name "Reclaim the Fields" increased the confusion for them. For us, the Cravirola camp was a challenge to explain that the reason for having so few young people in peasant organisations, was not a lack of active young people interested in peasant issues, but a problem of organizational model. We wanted to show that if young people don't join POs, it is partly because these organisations are too vertical, too bureaucratic, too much lobby-oriented. It is an issue of different political culture. We were saying "We share all your ideas on food sovereignty, agrarian reform, peasant agriculture, biodiversity, etc, but we want to decide ourselves how we do things". As Cravirola camp was a success, ECVC started to be much more positive about it. In Copenhagen, sharing the school and going together in mobilizations strengthened the mutual understanding. Yet, while last year still more than 1/3 of people taking part to RTF were members of ECVC organizations, now many more people want to join who are not linked to ECVC. *So what is today*

our link with Via campesina? (All those who were active in RTF last year are already tired with this discussion!)

The group started with a "youth" identity. It was not exclusive, but rather a will to take a space in debates mostly dominated by people over 50 years old, to speak about the issue of access to land among those directly affected. In November 2008, we described ourselves as "Young peasants, landless people, prospective peasants, people who want to take back control over food production". It worked pretty well as in majority "young people" came to Cravirola. *Is it still necessary to keep being "young"?*



Up to now, the only organizational tool we have been using is "youthcoord", a mailing list with about 20 people which mainly prepare and organize the camps and meetings. We had the ambition to create a "movement", yet under this perspective we did not really succeed in Cravirola, as many questions linked to structuring a movement have not been dealt with (lacking time on Sunday, or lacking collective will?). *How can we be more open? How do we want to organize now that we are much more people? Which strategies do we want to take to change the balance of power for peasant settling and land sharing? Do we want to be a network, an organisation, a coordination between local groups, a movement, the organizer of a yearly camp?*

From the beginning, we have linked the peasant issues with much more global issues. For us, peasant struggles are linked with struggles against capitalism. The camp in Cravirola showed that this perspective was shared by a lot of people. This is also the reason why we joined the block "system change not climate change" in Copenhagen. Yet, *how can we effectively work for a change of system without losing focus on farming?*

Reclaim the fields Camp 2011

21.-30. September, Rosia Montana in Romania

Food, land, seed, water and indigenous knowledge are too important to be commodified or centralised in the well-known capitalist way. We resist the logic of making profit of our ways of life. We are working on and already practicing a consensual way of peasant life and alternative ways of

living and farming together. Therefore we Reclaim the Fields!

We declare our solidarity with the people in Rosia Montana who have defended their land for 10



years against criminal corporate land grabbing, robbery and exploitation. Rosia Montana is a village in the Apuseni Mountains in Romania, under threat of being destroyed by a gold mining project in the name of profit.

There are many other fights for access and control around land throughout Europe and elsewhere, and many stories to tell and experiences to share.

If you are or dream of being a peasant, urban gardener, sustainable fisher, bee keeper, activist, ... then join us at the 3rd Reclaim the Fields Camp which will take place in Rosia Montana from 21st to 30th September 2011.

We want to create a common space together, share experiences and realities, exchange skills and knowledge, make the movement grow, put our energies together, reinforce local movements and struggles, find the links between each other and other anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist movements, celebrate our struggles together.

Let us spread the seeds of resistance and grow this camp together!

During this camp we will hold the General Assembly of Reclaim the Fields, to hear updates from campaigns over the last two years and look ahead to the future of the constellation. We will also create opportunities to learn about access to land and food sovereignty, and make real plans and exchanges of seeds, ideas for direct action, resistance, agricultural practices, gender issues...

The program is participative and will involve a large variety of workshops, practical activities, cultural events and most of all, time to get to know each other to share and learn. We depend on contributions by all participants, so if you want to hold a workshop, if you are an artist, a collective, or have other skills you want to share, contact us and contribute to the richness of the camp.

The kitchen and the logistics of the camp are organized collectively. You will be a part of the camp as it happens. We want to hold this camp as a children-friendly space. Childcare will be organized collectively so that every person can be able to participate as he-she pleases. We will ask for donations, but people who have difficulties coming to the camp for financial reasons, can contact



us and we will try to find financial support to make your coming possible.

Check out www.reclaimthefields.org for more info and register as soon as possible.

Contact: camp2011@reclaimthefields.org

Putting Together The Next Reclaim The Fields Camp Program

Hello, as you may know we are organizing our next Reclaim the Fields camp in Romania from the 21th to 30th of september.

During our last assembly, lots of ideas about content for the camp have been brought up. Now the process is moving on, as we are trying to shape the program of the upcoming camp. In this collective process the camp is dependant on everybody's contributions!

So please, if you want to hold a workshop, are an artist/collective and would like to perform, or know people who would like to contribute to the camp's program, please let us know at program@reclaimthefields.org. We also need more people to get involved in the preparation of the camp itself.

Hoping to read you soon, the program team...

IMPORTANT: If you want to help us building this camp you can contact the different teams at:

- program@reclaimthefields.org Program/Methodology
- fundraising@reclaimthefields.org
- logistics@reclaimthefields.org
- camp2011@reclaimthefields.org General Question about the camp
- caravan@reclaimthefields.org Project to go to eastern europe to promote the Camp
- easterneurope@reclaimthefields.org Collecting contacts of people or organisation that would be interested in the Camp

Or if you want to join the team that organises the Camp please register to the mailing list below.

<http://lists.reclaimthefields.org/mailman/listinfo/camp-working-group>


Resistance is fertile / Rezistentă e vie / La resistencia es fértil / Az ellenállás termékeny / La résistance est fertile / Съпротивата е плодородна / Widerstand ist fruchtbar / Опір є родючою

INTERNATIONAL CAMP / TABĂRA INTERNAȚIONALĂ / CAMPAMENTO INTERNACIONAL / NEMZETKÖ TÁBOR
CAMP INTERNATIONAL / ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛ СЪБИРАНЕ / МІЖНАРОДНІ ТАБІР.

PĂMÂNTUL E AL NOSTRU
RECLAIM THE FIELDS

ROSIA MONTANA - TRANSYLVANIA - ROMANIA

21-30 SEPTEMBER / SEPTEMBRIE / СЕПТЕМВРИ / SEPTEMBRE / DE SEPTIEMBRE / ВЕРЕСЕНЬ / SZEPTEMBER 2011



resistance is FERTILE

DEBATES / WORKSHOPS / DIRECT ACTIONS / MUSIC
DEZBATERI / ATELIERE / ACȚIUNI DIRECTE / MUZICĂ
DEBATES / PRÁCTICA ACTIVIDADES / ACCIONES DIRECTAS / MÚSICA
VITÁK / GYAKORLATI TEVÉKENYSÉGEK / KÖZVETLEN KERESETEK / ZENE
DÉBATS / ATELIERS / ACTIONS DIRECTES / MUSIQUE
Разисквания / Практически дейности / Екшън / Музика
DEBATTEN / WORKSHOPS / DIREKTE AKTIONEN / MUSIK
Дебати / Практична діяльність / Пригоди / Музика

WWW.RECLAIMTHEFIELDS.ORG CAMP2011@RECLAIMTHEFIELDS.ORG

Salvați ROSIA MONTANA

eco ruralis

WORLD BOMB

Resistance is fertile / Rezistentă e vie / La resistencia es fértil / Az ellenállás termékeny / La résistance est fertile / Съпротивата е плодородна / Widerstand ist fruchtbar / Опір є родючою

Get ready for the General Assembly (GA) camp 2011 in Romania!

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAG!

Summoning you to the General Assembly, to take place during the 2011 camp in Romania.



Despite the difficulties of discussing matters amongst large numbers of people, it is important to draw up an account of these past two years of progress (since the camp in Cravirola, France) and to come to some shared perspectives.

Let us take the time to reflect on the process over 2 years of Reclaim the Fields, from the camp at Cravirola, France, to that at Rosia Montana, Romania.

Let us find the directions ahead together.

Proposition for the Planning of the General Assembly for the RTF constellation

To ensure that all - both new and older members - feel welcome, it would be useful to cast an eye over previous bulletins, understand the historical context of decisions made: compose a (4 page?) short history of what has come about so far.

- “ who we are” (bulletin 2)
- the constellation explained to the stars (bulletin 1)
- Barcelona decisions on the use of the name rtf (bulletin 1)



Furthermore, to prepare, so that each person can have read it before the camp, a report of the different working groups: seeds, collective farms, training networks, access to the land, fights against the megaprojects or similar, the consensus and perhaps some that I have forgotten... In the same vein of thought, the different ‘local groups’, especially those who have carried out or participated in one or more actions or activities, could put together a report to share those experiences.

In order for this General Assembly to represent a strong moment for R.T.F, we must ensure that its preparation and planning is a joint effort and begins in advance of the camp itself taking place; the more preparatory documents we have in circulation, the easier it will be for others to participate.

To increase the visibility of the constellation, there is a call to collect leaflets and posters made from the RTF perspective (in its name or not; a great debate), with the goal of creating an exhibition at the camp in Romania (contact kister@no-log.org).

Points to address during the General Assembly

- Perspectives and political potential, assessment of the two camps/historical perspective
- Assessment and reflection on experience and strategies
- Assessment and reflection on the work groups
- Assessment and reflection on actions and activity (including current, if those involved are present, recalling the aims and goals)
- Discussions about the bulletins
- When the next reunion will be (note: the bulletin group changes from meeting to meeting, but does not necessarily have to be those who host the meeting, there are always possibilities for sending articles, leaflets, accounts of activity)
- The processes of the core committee (open and rotating posts) (the core committee are a changing group and open to all those who attend meetings).
- Any further ideas are most welcome; it is an open process

Methodology

- Information at the GA and small group discussions
- Group by language and by country in order to create local groups

Hints for personal reflection

- Two complementary strategies: radicality and communal work
- On the issue of seeds: working with others on existing initiatives
- On the issue of land occupations: willingness to alert other groups and open up our actions to them
- Doing things our way and creating discussion with others
- ? Links with the Via Campesina
- Finding a way to make occupation a moment open to all, efficient, with well-equipped and positive demonstrations (with the possibility that families attend)
- Go through actions with people who participated in them

- Action in the wider sense (from the protest to seminars and the notion of seed-exchange)
- Expectations, what actually happened, hopes and expectations for the next time



Romania: GM Trojan horse within the EU?

In the past twenty years in Romania we have seen the restructuring of agriculture from the communist system towards a liberal 'market economy' system. With entry into the European Union in 2007, Romania has begun to face a new series of problems: the transformation of Romanian agriculture, as mentioned before, is extremely rapid, and it is not impossible that the face of Romanian agriculture will resemble, in 20 years, that of other EU member countries: concentration of the land, enlargement of farms, rural exodus, the use of hybrid sowing and mechanisation.

Romania is a country of farmers. This cannot escape the notice of travellers...All over the country, people work the land, often only with the support of the horse. A third of the active population are farmers. This percentage, however, appears to be rapidly diminishing. Official Romanian statistics put the figure at 28% in 2008, whereas it was still 35% in 2003. One estimates therefore that the active farming population is over 2.6



million, that is to say, a decrease of roughly one million in five years. In parallel, an increase in emigration is noted, towards the other countries of the EU, Australia, and Canada. As an indication, in France, the active agricultural population is less than 3%, with 805, 857 employed in agriculture in 2007 (according to Insee). In terms of mechanisation, the difference between France and Romania is also substantial. According to the FAO, in 2007, Romania had 174 000 tractors whereas in France, there were 1.135 million tractors – or more than one tractor per active agriculturalist (proportionally, 20 times more than in Romania).

A dual agriculture

In contrast to most European countries, Romanian farmers are clearly divided into two types: on the one hand, 2.6 million farms of less than one hectare, which practise a peasant-style agriculture, and on the other, 9600 large farms of more than 100 hectares. These large farms receive the greater proportion of agricultural grants. In France, the average size of farms was, in 2000, 42 hectares (compared to 15 hectares in 1955, a figure accompanied by a large decrease in their total number). In 2006, there was a total of 350,000 farms in France.

The contrasting topography of Romania partially explains the duality: to the east and in the north of the country, large mountainous zones predominate (Transylvania, Valachi, Moldova); to the west and the south, a fertile plain where more intensive agriculture takes place. It is on these plains where fields of genetically modified crops are mainly concentrated. It is often said, and the example of Romania confirms it, that GMOs are of more interest in large farms.

Romania is both an exporter of primary agricultural materials and importer of processed food products. In 2005, processed products represented 68% of imports, whereas unprocessed goods represented 59% of exports. In 2009, Romania was the 5th agricultural producer in the EU, and yet imported agrifood products to the value of 3.7 million euros. This imbalance is linked to the fact that the large farms, sustained by public funds saturate the market with primary materials which they export at a low price, without processing.

Abandonment of GM soya and introduction of corn (Mon810)

Transgenic cultures in Romania are not a recent phenomenon. The first GM products were introduced to the country in 1998, with the authorisation of 14 varieties of soya for commercial cultivation, although no legislation provided for the evaluation or follow-up of these cultures. At the time, GM soya was considered



from the legislative standpoint as being equivalent to conventional varieties. The first official statistics for GM soya date from 2004. Surfaces sown with GM soya totalled 5523 hectares in 2004, 87600 in 2005 and 137275 in 2006. By the time Romania became a member of the EU in 2007, the cultivation of GM crops was officially forbidden in the country, to conform with European regulations. Indeed, no GM soya is authorized for cultivation within the EU.

In the same year, a further consequence of entry to the EU, was the famous corn Mon810, which was authorized for cultivation on Romanian territory. NGOs denounced the automatic authorization, made without public consultation and without evidence from independent studies into the impact of GM corn cultivation on the environment and on Romanian agriculture generally. Elsewhere, currently, no such studies are envisaged. However, Romania is a country where maize belongs to a cultural patrimony, and part of Romanian gastronomy is based around corn (such as mamaliga). Thus, in this country, one can find a very large genetic diversity of traditional corn varieties. The almost three million hectares planted with conventional maize, organic or traditional (that is to say, using non-hybrid sowing) are therefore exposed to contamination. However, the initial passion for maize Mon810 – from 332 hectares in 2007, to 6130 hectares in 2008 – has rapidly faded, with only 3244 hectares in 2009 and 823 hectares in 2010. In effect, the Mon810 is genetically modified to produce an insecticide against the European corn-borer (*Ostrinia nubilalis*), a parasite which does not have a significant presence in Romania. This GMO therefore does not hold much interest for Romanian farmers. Elsewhere, the NGO Green Agent reports that in 2007, in the county of Lasi, Mon810 was badly affected by the drought.



Romania defends GM in the EU

Since 2007, Romania has always defended a position in favour of GMOs in the European debate. On the occasion of votes relating to authorization, Romania has either been in favour of GMOs, or has abstained. However, Romania with its 14 votes is an important state. Thus, for example, it voted for the lifting of the Austrian moratorium on T25 and the French moratorium on Mon810, abstained on the Austrian and Hungarian moratoriums on Mon810. In a further example, Romania voted for the authorisation of maize Mir604, and abstained in July 2007 on the question of authorizing the Amflora potato.

This situation risks continuing in the years to come. In September 2010, Valeriu Tabara was elected

minister of Agriculture. A long time communist, he is known for his longstanding links with the agro-chemical industry. He played a key role in favour of the introduction of GM products to Romania, initially in the late 1990s, with the first crops of GM soya. Elsewhere he has declared on a number of occasions – in 2007 and in 2010, that he would support the authorization of GM soya crops before the European institutions. He justifies his declarations by referring to the ‘evident advantages at the agricultural level’ and the ‘positive impact on the Romanian economy’ engendered by its cultivation (2). As the InfOMG notes (3), Romania was one of the few countries worldwide to present statistics giving higher outputs by the hectare for GM versus conventional soya. The general public has never been able to verify the authenticity of these claims.

Valeriu Tabara makes no secret of his conflicts of interest. According to his last declaration on the subject, he remains in contact with Monsanto despite being Minister for Agriculture: ‘There is nothing secret or illegal about it’. What he doesn’t say is that he worked for Monsanto, as revealed on his CV downloaded from the Romanian Parliament website on the 2nd June 2006. Any mention of Monsanto has since been removed from this CV.

The pro-GM position of the Romanian government is further manifested in the number of GM trials taking place in the country. If Spain, unsurprisingly, remains the leader in field trials, Romania follows closely in second place... In 2008, the former hosted 45 trails out of 84 throughout Europe (some 54%), and in 2009, 61 trials out of 98 (62%). Romania hosted in 2008, 9 trials (11%), and 21 in 2009 (22%). (4). In 2010, the number of Romanian trials has further increased to 33.

Regulations are not applied

Romanian legislation in the sphere of GMOs is the result of a hasty reconciliation between national standards and European directives. Romania is the state with the most laws for GMO regulation (with a figure of 27). This leads to a complicated set of regulations which leaves much to interpretation. Out of 27 tests, 20 are Governmental decisions of urgency or ministerial ordinances, therefore without parliamentary debate. And, more importantly, without public debate.

Within the EU, the coexistence and its corollary, responsibility, are generated at the national level. Currently, Romanian law dictates that there must be a distance of 200m between GM and non-GM fields. In the case of contamination, it is the farmer with GM fields who is responsible, at least theoretically. Until the present day, there have been no complaints lodged for contamination, which in itself does not mean the absence of any contamination. But farmers do not have the financial or technical means to monitor this.

Beyond the texts, what poses the largest problem is the implementation of this regulation. The example of the prohibition of GM soya is typical. The surveillance of crops by the government was enormously lax, and no warnings or penalties were inflicted on farmers who failed to respect the newly proclaimed ban. Moreover, the national register of GMOs in 2006 shows that the authorities did not have any control over the cultivation of GM soya even when it was authorized in Romania. In the registers, there are a number of missing, (localisation of crops, size of fields, types cultivated, origin of the seeds, destination for the products etc.) erroneous, or transformed (for example, basic arithmetic errors regarding the total surfaces, etc) data. As dictated by the European legislation, Romanian legislation requires the labelling of GM products, as has been obligatory since June 2006 (Law 106/2002 – completed by the Governmental Decision 173/2006). However, this law is not implemented.

Currently, there are no commercialized food products in Romania labelled as containing GMOs. Romanian consumers are therefore unable to exercise their right to choose non-GM products, given the lack of a simple label identifying such products, which remains despite the existence since 2007 of a laboratory approved by the EU for testing GMOs.



'PUSHER'

Opposition to GMO comes from local authorities and consumers. In Romania today, there are 57 local authorities and 24 restaurants who have publicly declared themselves as GMO-free zones. They have signed a declaration of intention to ban GMOs and lobby the authorities and national politicians to ensure that the interests of farmers in Romania who choose to grow non-GM crops are protected by law. The 57 local authorities are themselves responsible for using democratic means, such as conferences and other educational activities directed towards persuading farmers

to not grow GM crops. In May 2010, InfOMG commissioned a national survey from OMNIBUS. 81,5% of Romanians wanted the authorities to prohibit GMOs, and 74,1% did not want to consume GMOs themselves.

In conclusion, Romania is a country with large agricultural potential where the majority of citizens and farmers do not want GM. Nonetheless, until the present day, the authorities play the game of the biotechnology industry, both in Romania but also at the level of the European Union. For how long?

1, <http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/dossiers/france-50-ans-transformations/mutations-agriculture.shtml>

2, http://db.zs-intern.de/uploads/1179935557-romania_gmsoy_23_05_2007.pdf

3, InfOMG est une veille citoyenne d'information sur les OGM en Roumanie :
<http://www.infomg.ro>

4, <http://www.infogm.org/spip.php?article3988>

Solidarity with the Arab revolutions

This winter marks the beginning of the revolt of many nations against their dictators, some of whom have now left office, and the movement continues.

It is a breath of fresh air for the whole world, the return of the right to rise up in the face of a political impasse which has been presented as the end of history and something that we must resignedly accept.

The driving force behind it comes from the youth (the majority of whom are from the lowest strata of society) who are not willing to accept a compromise and who dream of creating something new without strict leadership.

Such a revolt echoes other resistance movements, such as that of the Greek youths against the IMF and the police, the mafia in power, that of the Icelandic people who refuse to pay for the financial crisis of the banks, the minor revolt of students in Italy, in the UK, in Austria, the riots of the suburbs in France several years ago...

Throughout this refusal to be resigned, it is clear that to really stand together goes beyond words; the only method is to reject this resignation ourselves, to take the offensive and to signal our refusal.

With our various differences, this message touches us to the core and it is with joy and desire that we see this year begin.

Courage to all.

The constellation takes root in the UK

Over a long weekend, not so long ago, a motley group of around 60 growers and thinkers from all around the country converged on a land project in Heathrow to hold the first Reclaim the Fields UK gathering. For two days we spoke and worked together, sharing ideas about what we hold in common, and acknowledging the differences that set us apart. Through intense and fertile discussions, interspersed with work and play, we began to create visions of what a Reclaim the Fields group could become here in the UK.

In other parts of Europe, Reclaim the Fields has existed for a few years. It is structured as a constellation, spread across national borders, which is composed of peasant farmers, foresters, land squatters and urban food growers. The idea behind its creation was to link people from different cultural and legal contexts who are involved in struggles and issues surrounding food sovereignty. Its form aims at radical democracy, with no internal hierarchies and autonomous organisation between those who participate in it.

The stance of the group is anti-capitalist and its members are actively involved in creating alternatives to the environmental and social degradations of industrial agriculture. Besides sharing experiences and ideas, the group acts as a forum for researching and campaigning around issues of access to land and seed, spreading appropriate technology, establishing collective farms and creating solidarity between movements seeking to reclaim control over food production.

The first gathering

Throughout the discussions at Grow Heathrow a variety of common threads loosely united the assembled groups. From these four points emerged as themes and concerns in the development of

the network. These are points of solidarity from which we can strengthen our actions and ideas.

In the UK we suffer unparalleled land concentration and extremely low levels of agricultural employment. Those who want to return to working with the land are limited by exclusionary prices and disempowering planning systems while huge swaths of the country are held as the sole preserve of a few aristocratic families. To challenge this system ***we must critically analysis patterns of land ownership and distribution and create positive and practical alternatives.*** We need to forge common identities around the issue of land ownership in this country. From this base we can share tools and ideas for gaining access to land, and use the issue of food and land as a medium for larger social changes.

To effectively understand the structures of land ownership that underpin our agricultural systems



we must understand our place in time. We are born into a rich history of resistance and opposition to the enclosure of land and culture. Only by understanding the histories that form the ground we stand on can we create the futures we dream of. The Reclaim the Fields movement must look back as it looks forward. The lessons of history are as

valuable as the lessons of the present.

At the base of our projects and campaigns we are engaged in a revolution of what is considered normal. ***We need to change perceptions of food growing and land based work;*** we need to create a vibrant culture that values sustainable production and the integrity of domains free from privatisation. To catalyse a culture change on the scale necessary we must reach out beyond our circles to create spaces of inclusion and participation where viable alternatives are lived and felt as new realities.

In a project of this scale ***the Reclaim the Fields network has a valuable role to play in strengthening mutual support networks between projects.*** We need to establish structures through which we can skills, opportunities and outlets for produce among people who want create livelihoods from land based work. Building a constellation of this kind involves establishing ways of

organising and communicating that facilitate democratic networks across diverse contexts. Our strength is measured by the integrity of the relationships between us; by coming together we can strengthen our call.

Besides the discussions about what Reclaim the Fields could become, we also worked to carve a small field from the jungle of junk ridden brambles surrounding the back of the site, and built a series of raised beds at the roadside. As the nights drew in we chatted and sung by the fire and hung a few mischievous items of solidarity broadcasting from local viewpoints. In this soup of ideas and dirty hands the first murmurs of Reclaim the Fields passed into reality; what is built from this ground remains to be seen.



All those who are interested in becoming involved in this expanding constellation are welcome to learn more and add their energy to the building momentum. There is talk of organising a second gathering over the summer and many of us will be travelling to the Reclaim the Fields European camp in Romania this September. The invitation extends to all.

In the mean time, see www.reclaimthefields.org for dates, news and publications by the group.

To join the UK mailing list email uk@reclaimthefields.org

Stay in touch, spread the word. Resistance is fertile.

Rossport – continuing the land struggle in Western Ireland

Land struggle in Ireland

The struggle for land has always had a resonance in Ireland, a legacy of a long colonial history under English rule and a society that remains strongly rural in nature. The use of displacement

from land to break the resistance of indigenous people was a regular tactic with several centuries of the “plantations” reducing and removing traditional land rights, penal laws focused on making it harder for Catholic families to own land, and so on. Access to land was used as a tool of suppression and control over the population, whether penalising the rebellious Irish or rewarding elites.

It is not surprising that, in return, the struggle for land rights plays a important part of Irish history. Movements such as the Land League in the 19th Century paved the way for Ireland's final struggle for independence. So powerful was this resistance that the word boycott entered the English language – the result of a successful campaign against a notorious agent for absent English landlords.

However, independence from British rule in 1921 did not result in an end of land politics. Much land remained in the hand of the Anglo-Irish gentry, often absentee landlords that continued to exert control over the rural parts of Ireland.

For those displaced during the era under British rule the saying came about “to Hell or Connaught” - Connaught being the western most province where land was considered the poorest. The farmers here struggled to make a basic living, working with poor soil. For generations they have slowly built up their farms, pulling seaweed in to improve the soil and eked out an existence. Immigration and its consequences remains high in these scattered communities.

Shell comes to Broadhaven Bay

It is against this background that in 2000 several representatives of Shell turned up at the farm of



Willie Corduff, a farmer whose land looked over Broadhaven Bay in northern Connaught, in the area known as Erris. They told him that they wanted to discuss the pipeline that was going through his land. This was the first he had heard of it.

Digging deeper it transpired that the Irish government had given to

the consortium of Shell (45%), Statoil of Norway (36.5%) and Vermillion of Canada (18.5%) the right to drill for natural gas in the Corrib fields off the north west coast. A refinery was to be built in Bellinaboy to handle the gas coming in from Corrib and other planned offshore fields. This required a high pressure pipe which would pass through the lands of the various farmers, coming close to the their homes.

The pipe would pass through the bogs of a beautiful and diverse landscape and pass close to the homes of the spread out community. A community that nobody had thought to consult. Fear for their personal safety, their livelihoods and for the environment meant they could not stand idly by. Several local campaigns developed to resist the project, the most prominent of which is Shell to Sea. The aim of Shell to Sea is to ensure the exploitation of the offshore fields does not come at the expense of the local community and its environment, and to renegotiate the outrageous giveaway which transferred the resources of Corrib into private and unaccountable hands.



Since 2000 the campaigns have relentlessly opposed at every stage the building of the refinery and the pipelines through legal methods. From 2005 this moved up a level, fighting the development with their bodies as well. This has been despite heavy handed police and state pressure. Five farmers, including Willie Corduff, were jailed indefinitely for refusing Shell access to their land, leading to a massive outcry through-out Ireland. At one point 2000 police were drafted in to allow Shell to return to work following constant blockade of the refinery site. In 2008, people put their bodies on the line to interfere with the Solitaire, the ship laying the offshore part of the pipeline, being so effective that the Irish navy had to be brought in.

All of this in the face of State pressure, with the politicians refusing to help the people they were supposed to resist, and the local judge showing incredible bias time and time again. Hearings with various government agencies rubber-stamped what every Shell wanted despite the community putting forward alternative solutions to resolve the conflict.

Though violence has not been on a par with what has been experienced by the Ogoni people of Nigeria (with whom links have been made, as with other land struggles), both the police and Shell's own security, RMS, have been known to be heavy handed, increasing the sense of a community under siege – but only having the effect of resolving determination, not breaking it. RMS employees are known to have links with fascist groups.

Though Shell and its partners have continued to push forward with its plans, the opposition has

delayed it by a decade and caused it immense costs. Currently, it is entering the next stage of the pipeline, bringing it on shore to link it up with the refinery – which has been semi-mothballed and suffering its own complications due to the long delays. At this stage a specialist boring machine is being brought in to drill underground. This is a crucial stage of the process, but resistance remains determined.

Rosspport Solidarity Camp

In 2005, there was a call-out for support. This led to the establishment of the Rosspport Solidarity Camp, a standalone group which is as much about showing support to the local community as taking action. RSC has since become a powerful demonstration of how campaigners can interact with local communities over land struggle issues, despite differences in political outlook. It has not been a smooth journey, but it has been an important one from which much has been learned.



RSC has built strong links with people from the UK and further abroad, many people coming to it and staying having fallen in love with the place. It is a space for non-hierarchical and non-discriminatory politics that has opened up an interesting space in what is a traditionally conservative area. The amount of support it receives from the locals is a testament to how much it has become part of the area. Part of this has been

achieved through clear goals, rules on the camp and ensuring that outreach into the community is maintained. It is not uncommon for people from the camp to go to help on the farms or local gardens as well as be involved in actions.

This year, the camp has moved to a field directly overlooking the new Shell compound at Aghoos, determined to ensure that resistance continues. Bar the Shell machinery, it is a stunning site, surrounded by a ring of mountains, next to the bay. Already, numerous actions have taken place against workers, from walk-ons to blockades. The site has been set up with various marquees and

other structures to maintain a constant presence with a low-impact ethos.

All are welcome to come and contribute according to what they feel able to give, whether to carry out resistance or simply to support the camp. It is important to note that there are important guidelines which have been developed to ensure the camp remains sustainable for the many campaigners there and to make sure that relationships with the people of the area are respected.

For more information: <http://www.rossportsolidaritycamp.org/>

Geneva: Why do I occupy this field?

I occupy this field because I do not want to watch silently how this dead space, this desert, spreads over the Air-plane. This is desert for me: the industrial constructions, banks, motorways, parking lots, super markets, the mansion areas, sleeping cities and renovated farms, jamming the streets with their environment polluting 4x4s to get to the terrible offices in the city, to the golf courses, and stables,...

This field, though it looks like a field, isn't one. It is the good land where people can feed themselves and are able to live but was turned into an industrial park and exposed to speculation. It became a desert, colonised and degraded.

The redesignation of agricultural areas is a necessary for the development of cities and the disappearing numbers of small and middle scale farmers is a necessary for the development of the liberal economy. If the government supports the ideas of food sovereignty and local production, regionalism, and ecology, while at the same time creating a weak and soft zone around the cities, which it can destroy without it being noticed, it creates provisionally a little land, a few amphibians, a few local producers in a niche but nothing else and lets the economy stay. "In the niche small farmers!" In such a dismal environment many farmers sell their land to the best bidder instead of defending it.

But the land can only be defended if it is cultivated. That's why we make this field a field again and cultivate it. We start to reverse the trend, and if not in this field then in another one where we will live and create a space for resistance in the literal and the literary meaning because, bit by bit, we

learn to organise ourselves and to fight. This includes fighting for access to land. If all the land is broken up, fenced off, controlled, exploited, defined, limited, labelled, and made scarce, then all this land will be abandoned, which calls to fight and to resist going into exile.

This piece of land was integrated in 1996 into the plan to extend the industrial area Plans-les-Quates (ZIPLO). Since then it has lain almost 3 hectare of fallow land. In 2001 it was decided to build a high-tech centre there but nothing happened except for the spreading of weeds. It is therefore an exemplary case of a situation where the real estate sector and speculation go hand in hand.

The industrial area ZIPLO is managed by a real estate foundation (Foundation pour les Terrains Immobiliers, FTI), which is a public institution with the task of capitalising the industrial building land in the county. In 1996 with the arrival of the watch company Patek Philippe the area became 'attractive' for major brands. Piaget, Rolex and a number of small start-ups of this sector follow. The biotechnology sector of course doesn't wait any longer and in 1998, for example, the centre for new technologies (Centre des Technologies Nouvelles – CTN) was founded.

This is, by the way, the same project which was supposed to happen here, but bigger, between 2002 and 2004. But it did not happen as planned. The building permit was extended in 2008 for the last time and hasn't been renewed since. The company Tivona-Terra, which still appears on the official website as the proprietor was eliminated from the commercial register in 2010. The property actually belongs to a company of the Jelmoli group the Hydra of Swiss real estate.



Account of the manifestation-occupation against the airport, 7th May

7th May, Notre-Dame-des-Landes. After the call of the organization Reclaim the Fields and the occupants of the ZAD¹, 1000 people from around Nantes, all four corners of France and beyond, were mobilized to collectively occupy a parcel of wasteland, clear it, and begin a project of agricultural community gardening on this land.

This action is sited in the context of the occupation of the area affected by the airport; against the deadly urbanizing politics of metropolitan Nantes; for the reappropriation of agricultural lands, where access is progressively more difficult due to concretisation, land speculation and the policies of farm enlargement.



In the early morning, several hundred people loaded up a tow line with planks. Barrels of beer, wheelbarrows, an info kiosk, streamers...tools remained on the shoulders as everyone gathered together at the meeting point. In this way, a first procession reached the end of the ZAD. In the distance there were mobile armed guards, hidden out of the way: half turn, reverse, forward...Faced with this small band which seems to lack organization, they fled. They did not seem to want to see us up close.

10h. Punctual arrival at La Paquelais. After 30 minutes waiting, a procession of about 8000 people and 5 tractors headed in the direction of the ZAD to gather at the land to be cleared. Spades, pitchforks, scythes, halberds, machetes...the tools were held high. 'One could

¹ The zone assigned for huge development including an airport, a bypass and a TGV train line, officially known as the ZAD, "Zone d'Aménagement Différé" and by those resisting as the "Zone A Défendre"

say that we were storming the bastille!', comments one elderly man, a smile on his lips. 'Forward for the peasant revolt' cries another. No unifying slogans, but a parade interspersed with small groups, each as imaginative as the next. Carried along by a batucada, songs, slogans, a bicycle-mounted PA system...the atmosphere is warm and cheerful.

Arriving at the land, a small first speech takes place; too many people, not enough watts, not everybody manages to hear or take part, but the crowd is enthusiastic. A tractor opens the wasteland and the clearers enter the scene. At the same time, the bar is put up, the beer cooled, the logistics for the day are put in place. Fieldside, after 1 hour of work, the land is already well cleared. The accordions come out and an improvised dancefloor appears. Everything goes into the clearing; a few fingers are cut in view of the energy put into the work! Some workers even forget to eat!

In the middle of the afternoon, a small soundsystem is erected on the land, for the speeches: various groups fighting against the Notre-Dame Airport; but also collectives from elsewhere protesting against land development (against a high voltage line in Catalunya, against the extension of Heathrow airport) and more witnesses of previous successful protests in the region (against nuclear reactor projects at Carnet and Pellerin). After these speeches, meeting points for various protests and actions are given for the upcoming month, around Notre Dame and beyond. The groups remain to carry on discussing a range of issues: gentrification of the countryside, the fight against the MAT, memories of past protests are shared....

It goes on throughout the afternoon and into the night: a dozen heaps of brambles are strewn across the ground. Mission accomplished! Work remains – felling a few trees and preparing the land, but already an impressive amount of work has been completed. The agricultural work can soon begin! The day finishes with an evening of concerts, festivities, meetings, till late in the night.



Sunday, a difficult awakening, but the discussions are organized about an eventual anti G8/G20 camp on the ZAD. This action is the first large scale occupation of the zone involved in the airport.

The general enthusiasm provokes ideas for new actions of this type. At the same time, the occupation of the ZAD has been followed up; other installations are in progress.

The one who has the seeds, has the say

With this slogan, a growing movement has been showing us the stealthy tendency of privatisation and patenting of seeds, which is still largely unnoticed by the public.

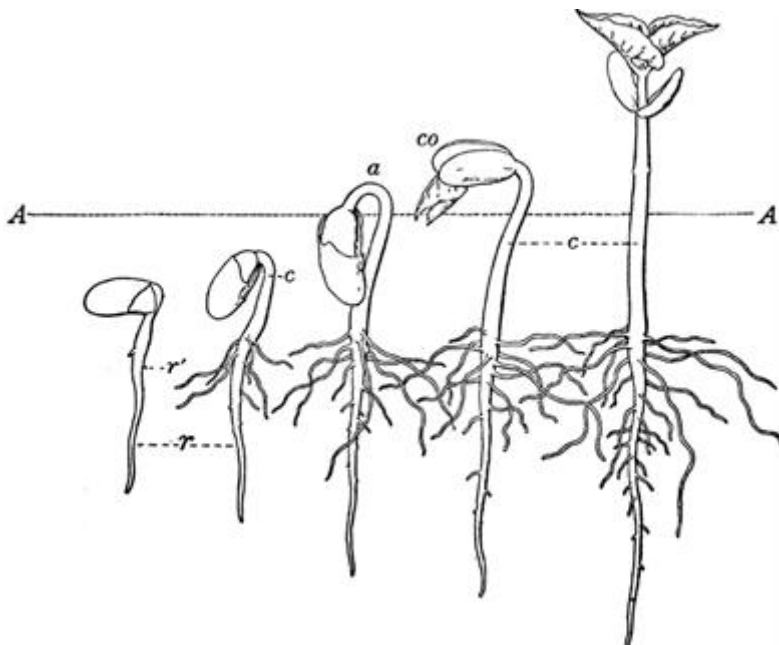
While GMOs are already rejected by a large majority of the population, the issue of “seeds” has yet to develop mass mobilisation potential, even though the questions which relate to it are rather simple.

Seeds are the first step of food production and thus constitute the basis of our whole nourishment. Asking about seeds means no less than asking who's in charge of our livelihood: people themselves or half a dozen of transnational corporations? The access to seeds is – along with the access to

ground and water – the most important basis of food-sovereignty and autonomy of food supply. The free access to seeds is a human right, according to the UN Special Rapporteur of the right to food.

Industrial seeds, which are highly promoted by the big companies to feed the growing world population, are adapted to a model of agriculture that only focuses on yield increase and economic growth. This model prefers

quantity to quality, surplus to nutritional value, monoculture to diversity and centralisation to self-organisation. It consists of only a few high-yield varieties, which are cultivated in monoculture with high inputs of fertilisers and pesticides.



This agricultural model relies on a few high-yielding varieties in monocultures, to which the environment has to adapt via chemical additives – instead of relying on small-scale, biodiverse farming systems, exhibiting an high diversity of cultivars, adaptability to climate conditions and environment. But it is especially the diverse, small-peasant based agriculture that can feed the world – as was stated in the IAASTD Report in 2008. This is, however, often neglected in the growth-oriented model of agriculture.

In this respect, seed related issues always imply the question of which type of agriculture we want to use and how we want to nourish ourselves. It furthermore includes the question of who's ruling the global food production and food supply. This is why we should try to analyse developments concerning the seed issues very critically and try to exert influence on them.

The current developments consist of two important aspects – the Intellectual Property Rights of seeds and the still quite unknown Seed Marketing Act.

Intellectual Property Rights on plants and animals

According to the TRIPS Agreement (agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights), every Member has to offer patent protection for inventions in all areas of technology. This includes products or processes that are new, involve an inventive step, and are capable of industrial application. Such a requirement is subject to some exceptions. Members are not required to grant patents over plants or animals if “inventions” of animals and plants are protected “either by patents or by an effective sui generis system or by any combination thereof” (TRIPS Agreement, Art. 27, Par. 3b).

UPOV Plant Variety Protection

While the USA protect “innovations” of plant varieties through patents, the EU and other countries signed the UPOV Plant Variety Protection Convention as a sui generis system for the plant and seed sector. The Plant Variety Protection Convention asserts less rights to the “inventor” than would be exercised by patents. Originally, the protection included privileges for farmers and breeders, allowing them to breed with protected plant varieties and to reproduce them. The revision of the UPOV in 1991, however, changed the farmers' privileges. Since UPOV 1991 Members of UPOV are allowed to prohibit farmers to save seeds and to replant seeds of protected varieties without fees.

The arrangement of the Intellectual Property Rights is being permanently tightened, particular

through the influence of the industry. Only a few countries, such as India and Ethiopia, were able to establish a sui generis system that supports the Farmers' Rights rather than the private economy. Industrial countries are trying to abolish this system through bilateral trading treaties, e.g. the Free Trade Agreement between India and the EU that is about to be debated.

Patents on life

Along with genetic engineering, the principle of patenting seeds has also managed to sneak into the European law. The patent protection ranges from the gene to harvest, manufacture and breeding. There are patent fees for everything. Breeding, saving seeds and reproduction of patented seeds is forbidden.

It is clear that the intellectual property rights of plants and seeds – in the interest of major companies – have become stricter in these past years. This triggered a price increase of seeds and monopoly formation on the seed market.

A definite alarm signal is that, even organisations that usually support privatisation – like the World Bank and the WTO –, admit that there is a link between stricter intellectual property rights and monopoly formation in the seeds sector, as well as between patents on seeds and rising seed prices.

Seed Marketing legislation

The Seed Marketing legislation is, however, not as present in the media and in public as patents and plant variety rights.

While the field of Intellectual Property Rights is supposed to protect the interests of the breeders, the Seed Marketing legislation dictates which plant varieties are allowed to be merchandised on the commercial seeds market. According to the legislation, the only varieties allowed on the market are those which are registered in the Common EU Catalogue of varieties. The criteria for the registration are geared towards industrial seeds. Many traditional and regional varieties, as well as new varieties which are qualified for organic farming, do not apply to those criteria and are therefore not considered registrable. Also, the registration of varieties is linked with such high costs



that it hardly pays off for small breeding companies.

Since the Seed Marketing Act is currently in revision and is about to be unitised for all EU countries, a discussion about how the seeds legislation could be remodeled and how the respective EU committees could be influenced has aroused between breeding companies, initiatives for seed protection, gardeners and farmers.

The Seed Marketing Legislation's Europe-wide unitisation is a problem, especially for EU countries that still cultivate traditional plant varieties and EU countries in which peasant agriculture and seed exchanges are still commonly accepted and part of the cultural practise.

The placing on the market (by selling or exchanging) of seeds that are not registered in the Common EU Catalogue will be illegal when the new unitised European law is enforced.

So far, the EU legislation concerning seeds is a maze of paragraphs. Even key terms, e.g. "placing on the market", aren't accurately defined yet.

Reaction of the seed movement

Unfortunately, not even the members of the critical seed activist milieu agree on how all these problems should be solved. The opinions and positions of the countries and activists are just too different.

Influencing the EU seed law elaboration by lobbying is a first step. The so-called EU Conservation Varieties Guidelines already includes the basic idea of diminishing the costs and the bureaucracy of a Common EU Catalogue registration. However, reality hasn't caught up with this idea yet.



Lobbying or grassroots movements?

Lobbying and influencing the EU Conservation Varieties Guidelines is a possible method to support variegated, breedable seeds, together with the interests of small seed breeding and seed conservation organisations. A more elaborate varieties conservation guideline would ensure an official and well-regulated seed market, including traditional land varieties too. The goal of this

method is to change the registration criteria so that traditional land varieties and varieties that are especially qualified for organic farming can also be registered in the Common EU Catalogue as conservation varieties, which can be officially sold. Initiatives supporting the variety conservation could therefore stop operating in the grey area of legislation. It would also prohibit lawsuits like the one against the French initiative “Kokopelli”.

But lobbying and influencing the EU seed laws also calls for patience and optimism. Even if initiatives and NGOs are asked to play a part in the EU action sheet, this doesn't automatically mean that they are able to stand up to the strong lobby of industry and enterprises.

Instead of getting lost in the maze of laws, one could also establish alternatives to the formal and law-focused seeds sector.

This includes public seed banks, as well as knowledge of seed propagation, to be circulated freely and permanent breeding of seeds to enhance their adaptation to the environment and the climate.

It is important to consider both methods as possible solutions to the problem – one method does not necessarily exclude the other. Lobbying at the EU level will only be influential if there are alternatives that can be pointed out. Choosing alternative methods, however, will only be possible if the laws aren't so strict that every step in another direction is forbidden.

The seed campaigns relating to the Via Campesina Action Day, on April 17th, have shown us that it is, in fact, possible to establish alternatives to the present seed arrangements.

Seed swaps as a practical and politicizing moment

Besides the large demonstrations in favour of seed sovereignty and against the EU-legislation in Brussels on April 18th, many decentralized activities and events for seed sovereignty and especially seed swaps took place all over Europe. The English campaign „Seedy Sundays“, which – inspired by similar activities in Canada – organizes seed swaps across the UK, is serving as a model. People gather to exchange GMO-free and non-hybrid seeds, young plants and experiences. Since then, seed swaps campaigns have not just grown but also introduced other activities like books exchanges and cultural programs for children and youth, as well as movies and theatre plays. Courses about the spreading and conservation of seed varieties are offered as well. The number of visitors is constantly growing. Hence seed swaps constitute an ideal form of action to link people, who in other contexts would hardly cross in each others way. For example, old and young, migrants

and locals whose families are deeply rooted in the region, people from cities and villages, groups who fight for social causes and those who are more concerned with environmental issues. The topic of seeds can open a broad debate about agriculture, property and the larger socio-political issues, while encouraging different forms of action. In Berlin, for instance, a colourful Guerrilla Gardening parade planted green crops on an abandoned strip of land in the scope of a seed swap event.



Linking Rural and Urban agriculture

“As a woman from the city, I can also make a contribution to seed sovereignty!” said a visitor after a keynote speech in the scope of a seed swap event – expressing a core point of the growing movement: within decades, the urban man has alienated himself from nature and agricultural production processes. This has caused well known severe consequences – from an increase of psycho-social disorders to regularly occurring food scandals – which represent only the peak of supermarket problems. According to many people, a critical turning point has been reached. They do not want to continue like this anymore and have actively decided to do something to change the situation. A garden boom is emerging in urban areas. Young families rent a piece of land outside the city centre, left-wing groups begin to discover environmental issues and occupy uncultivated fields to convert them into community

gardens. More and more people begin to be concerned about the origin and quality of seeds. The step from own seed production and swap to activism is close. Besides the advantages of cost savings, the own production of seeds is experienced by young people with the pride of having created something with their own hands. Some speak of an addictive factor or satisfaction in trying to obtain more and more diverse seeds. If these people also conceptualize their activity as a political statement and actively engage themselves in supporting free varieties, a strong movement could develop. Urban citizens would show an interest for the concerns of farmers (due to heavy workload, long working hours farmers hardly have time for political activism). Therefore, problems of the industrialized agriculture could better be tackled together. The city and the countryside



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would no longer be separated environments, loaded with mutual prejudices.

Toothless Wisdom

Whereas young people begin to rediscover the seed as an interesting topic, the elderly, on the other hand, have always experienced seed production as part of everyday life. Their voice and expertise are gradually being heard and recognized within the seed swap movement. Seed swaps such as, for instance, “Red de Semillas” in Spain or “Colher para Semear” in Portugal, regularly organize a so called “round table of wisdom”. Old people, over 80 years, who have rarely ever left their village, participate in these roundtables and share their expertise about old varieties of seeds and the respective cultivation methods. The round tables are being filmed to preserve old and nearly lost knowledge to future generations.

Seed spreads by nature - we help it to travel

Seeds are not restricted to national borders or territories. In the globalizing world, it is increasingly spreading – for the better or for the worse. Thus, the politization of the garden and seeds topics involves, in addition to other integrative aspects, an intercultural component: on one hand, there is the curiosity about the “exotic” seed from Turkey or Indonesia and, on the other hand, migrants get a possibility to get in contact with people from the host society and exchange ideas about gardening. Communication in gardening and seed swap is not restricted to language or belonging. In Germany, there are currently 80 intercultural gardens – with a growing trend. For some migrants, community gardening has proven to be a supportive and helpful coping strategy in the adaptation to their host society and for dealing with traumata and alienation. The topic of seeds and seed swaps should be integrated in the intercultural gardens, as migrants constitute linkages to their home country. At the moment, a law is about to be implemented at EU level. But the broader strategy reveals that the EU will generally have more influence on seed issues globally. The abovementioned free trade agreement between India and the EU already predicts that the global food model will be steered by the EU.

Janun Göttingen is a German environmental organisation that focuses on such a project this year.

We are especially trying to reach young people from different EU countries. So far, the participating initiatives come from Portugal, Spain and Germany. They cultivate seeds from their regions that cannot be found in the Common EU Catalogue of varieties and that are – most likely – bound to be considered illegal after the new EU law comes into force. Furthermore, the participating initiatives

try to follow up the planned legislation and its consequences, while also educating themselves in a more practical way – how does one build Seed Bombs, how does one reap seeds from tomatoes? The groups communicate through an internet website and share their progress. In September 2011, the groups will meet at an international activity and encounter camp within the framework of the “Reclaim The Fields Camp” to exchange the reaped seeds. This camp will release interesting pulses, e.g. through seed seminars with theoretical and practical parts and through discussions concerning the political agenda of the topic. Hopefully, ideas for further activities will come up as well.