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The Work of La Via Campesina regarding the Intersection of Land Occupation and Food Sovereignty

Abstract

La Via Campesina (LVC), a global movement that supports small and local farmers and their communities, is one of the world's largest food and agricultural rights movements and advocates for agricultural rights in terms of land, ecology, human rights, and more. LVC is known for its establishment of food sovereignty, defined as the right to control one's production and consumption of food. This new concept placed them on the map, accompanied by their aggressive editorial and advocacy work against ideals they view as neoliberal and food policies that benefit large food moguls while disenfranchising the small farmer. The concept of food sovereignty is now a main driving force for global food activism and is being used by passionate individuals and entities who consider the idea applicable to all areas of the agricultural world.

A prime factor in achieving food sovereignty for small producers is land tenure, which is increasingly under fire throughout Europe. Foreign investors, corporations, and even national governments are engaged in the process of "land grabbing" that creates problems for small farming communities throughout Europe and beyond. When land grabbing occurs, small farmers are not only displaced from their homes and careers, but are also removed from discussions about ecological practices, food production, and food distribution. The only voices who hold weight are large farming companies or foreign investors who do not see food as a way of life, but as a commodity for future profit. What the world does not realize is that when agricultural rights, such as access to land, are taken from small farmers, they are also depriving those small communities of sustainable, local food sources, nutritional food that supports the diets of the region, and the financial support that small farmers rely on to live.

This project discusses land grabbing in eastern and central Europe, linking these nations' collective experiences to food sovereignty and how it contributes to land tenure in the region. I then address LVC as a movement that uses food sovereignty as a base for its advocacy in supporting the global peasantry. LVC's European branch, ECVC, gives LVC a European base to spread its mission give localized support to rural farmers in that region. Lastly, I analyze the impacts that LVC and ECVC have on global policy, national law, and their overall progress in the food sovereignty movement. Through their consistently amplified voice, extensive internal structure, and unrelenting participation, LVC has made a significant impact through various avenues in fighting against land grabbing and, therefore, furthering the food sovereignty movement.

Land Occupation: Conceptual Origin

Land occupation and mass privatization is not new, but rather an established concept that has spread across the globe over time. Many argue that land occupation spread around the world through European imperialism and various waves of land and resource privatization and development. Peter Linebaugh writes on "the commons", a notion that focuses on the communal exchanging of resources and collectivity of the community when using those resources. He articulates how the historic act of enclosure, otherwise known as privatization, has stifled the model of the commons. He argues that some of the earliest instances of European privatization can be dated back to England. When writing on the origin of enclosure, Linebaugh states that "the process of enclosure had been ongoing in England since the thirteenth century before reaching one peak during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" where the areas of common land began being collected in the hands of a minority of the population.¹ Linebaugh also argues that

¹ Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief!: The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, p. 142.

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the various waves of enclosure have accompanied government interference with the commons, which were viewed as actions in favor of the commodification of resources for economic benefit. These waves consisted of various stages of enclosure, including “a great wave of enclosure... with the birth of the aggressive nation-state... [,] another wave led by parliament in the eighteenth century [, and] a third wave [that] wrought planetary damage beginning in the late twentieth century.” Over time, government actions, such as the 1793 Permanent Settlement Proclamation made by Governor-General of Bengal Charles Cornwallis and the English Enclosure Movement from 1725-1825 have made the idea of the commons or “commoning” not only “barbaric” but virtually non-existent.² These actions have shown a grave ignorance regarding the impact these governments’ actions have made on climate change and damage done by overall enclosure and privatization.

Now, after industrialization and privatization operations have taken over land, national governments have embraced a new stage of enclosure that consists of a modern system that manipulates the public’s understanding of land grabbing by hiding under claims of helping the planet. This system is known as “green grabbing”, a process involving powerful entities that collect land and use the cover of conservation to exploit it for personal benefit, whether that benefit be the accumulation of land as capital, exploiting resources from that land and presenting it as “clean energy development”, or making a profit from the restoration of land by artificial means and in turn, negatively withholding land from rural communities.³ One of the best-known examples of land withholding for restorative means is forest carbon, also known as “Reducing Emissions Deforestation (REDD and REDD+) which is intended to protect existing forests and

² Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief!: The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, p. 145.

³ “Green Grabbing,” Transnational Institute (The Transnational Institute, July 15, 2019), <https://www.tni.org/en/article/green-grabbing>.

create new forest plantations to fix carbon”, which cuts off land to small communities that intend to use the land for agricultural purposes.⁴ While their intention to preserve land is good, these actors of restorative practice do not understand that these small farmers understand the importance of land preservation practices, and utilize them, for the benefit of the climate and farming simultaneously.

One of the main arguments against green grabbing is articulated by Evangelia Apostolopoulou and William M. Adams in their essay that addresses neoliberal capitalism and conservation. They write that from a Marxist perspective, the separation of land and people is the easiest way for land to be converted from nature to “objects of exchange.”⁵ Green grabbing is generally conducted in the same process as the private acquisition of land by foreign investors for development and profit. However, it is presented under a new name that attempts to emphasize saving the planet while distracting the public from “policies that are destructive to both ecosystems and people and as a strategy by which capitalism seeks to advance itself.”⁶

The understanding of land ownership has evolved from a concept that presents land as a resource for food and for communal support to a perspective where land is a commodity that can be bought, overused, exploited, and then manipulated as a tool solely for development. Land occupation requires strict focus if advocates are to succeed in slowing or preventing mass land concentration.

Instances of Land Occupation in Eastern and Central Europe

⁴ Green Grabbing,” Transnational Institute, Accessed 16 March 2022.

⁵ Evangelia Apostolopoulou and William M. Adams, “Neoliberal Capitalism and Conservation in the Post-Crisis Era: The Dialectics of ‘Green’ and ‘Un-Green’ Grabbing in Greece and the UK,” *Antipode* 47, no. 1 (February 2014): p. 15-35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12102>.

⁶ Evangelia Apostolopoulou and William M. Adams, “Neoliberal Capitalism and Conservation in the Post-Crisis Era: The Dialectics of ‘Green’ and ‘Un-Green’ Grabbing in Greece and the UK,” p. 15-35.

EU and national officials have made large efforts through legislation toward the prevention of land grabbing at an accelerated rate, but there is still inaccuracy in international land policy and weak governmental regulation against land grabbing. This is primarily seen in the creation of policies such as or similar to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). CAP focuses on the efficiency of land output and the creation of market-oriented sectors that focus on competitiveness and the income of producers. This policy primarily looks at the quantity of output and efficiency in production and rewards farms through payment, giving them a price based on the amount of land they own. However, CAP only considers the amount of land owned by that farming individual or entity. Therefore, larger farms that are owned by companies may have more supply and can make a larger profit than small farms that do not produce as much and do not always operate with the ideal efficiency for the economic market.⁷ When small farms lose funding from policies, they are forced to charge more or face losing their land. If they cannot keep up with competitive prices, their land is taken by lucrative agribusiness that is trying to accumulate profit. Because of this process, small farmers are consistently losing their ability to feed themselves and the community around them. Foreign investors accumulate land and then reap the benefits of subsidies from these policies that grant money to farms based on the amount of land they have acquired. National governments are the primary perpetrators of these policies, apart from CAP. This means that while some nations have strong protections against land grabbing, other nations, such as Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Ukraine, lack protective policies or have loose regulations that allow for more dispossession.

⁷ European Coordination Via Campesina. "Informative Fiche: How the Cap Impacts Access to Land." European Coordination Via Campesina. European Coordination Via Campesina, June 24, 2021. <https://www.eurovia.org/informative-fiche-how-the-cap-impacts-access-to-land/>.

Romania's agricultural prospects are high due to its quality of land, which is considered pedoclimatic and beneficial for agricultural production. However, the agricultural structure is inadequate compared to other nations in Europe, meeting levels of development similar to that of Latin America, and therefore not having enough supportive funding for agricultural activity. This means that Romania faces land occupation by foreign investors and profit-driven entities at arguably "the maximum intensity" because foreign investors who can afford the high cost of production are purchasing all viable land available.⁸ A report conducted by researcher Vasile Burja on land concentration in Romania noted that "the agrarian structure [of Romania] is the result of economic policies implemented after 1989 that led to the excessive fragmentation of the land and favored the manifestation of the phenomenon of land grabbing"⁹. This can be attributed to the 1989 Romanian revolution against their established communist government. After the new Romanian government was stabilized, their sole direction for land reform was the privatization of land as repayment for the population's endurance of land collectivization during their communist period.¹⁰ This privatization benefited larger farming operations that could consistently run while smaller farming operations were given less financial support and fined if their production was unable to operate after 2 years.¹¹

A current Romanian press statement stated that about 40 percent of land in the nation today is owned by investors outside of the nation or the EU, while 20-30 percent of land is

⁸ Vasile Burja, Attila Tamas-Szora, and Iulian Bogdan Dobra, "Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Sustainable Development of Agriculture in Romania," *Sustainability* 12, no. 5 (October 2020): p. 2137, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12052137>.

⁹ Vasile Burja, Attila Tamas-Szora, and Iulian Bogdan Dobra, "Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Sustainable Development of Agriculture in Romania," p. 2137.

¹⁰ Paul Dragos Aligica, and Adina Dabu. "Land Reform and Agricultural Reform Policies in Romania's Transition to the Market Economy: Overview and Assessment." *Eastern European Economics* 41, no. 5 (2003): 52. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4380352>.

¹¹ Paul Dragos Aligica, and Adina Dabu. "Land Reform and Agricultural Reform Policies in Romania's Transition to the Market Economy: Overview and Assessment," p. 52.

possessed by internal EU investors.¹² An effect of this is the displacement of small farmers and the concentration of land that small farmers are left to use, which in most cases is the least fertile land in the nation.¹³ Available land that is useful for crop growth has been consistently going up in price to match prices in western Europe, especially in rural areas where the quality of land for crops is higher.¹⁴ This situation “prices out” native farmers from land sale operations. Small farmers, while not being able to financially support themselves and forced to operate in the export motivated market-oriented agricultural model, also cannot keep up with supplies and storage.¹⁵ The domestic market, in this model, suffers as a result because the small community farming that used to support them, is now being replaced by operations that are solely export focused. While smaller farms do not have the funding or capacity to have large silos for crops, large companies take the money that they make through exports or foreign investment and support their production by paying for large storage structures.¹⁶ This inequality prevents growth for small farmers who do not meet the budget for the systems that large corporate farms can easily afford and contributes to their lack of operational sustainability.¹⁷

Land occupation is also prevalent in Hungary for many reasons, including the use of “pocket contracts” in land sales and exchange, according to Saturnino Borrás Jr., Jennifer

¹² Vasile Burja, Attila Tamas-Szora, and Iulian Bogdan Dobra, “Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Sustainable Development of Agriculture in Romania,” p. 2137.

¹³ Vasile Burja, Attila Tamas-Szora, and Iulian Bogdan Dobra, “Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Sustainable Development of Agriculture in Romania,” p. 2137.

¹⁴ Vasile Burja, Attila Tamas-Szora, and Iulian Bogdan Dobra, “Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Sustainable Development of Agriculture in Romania,” p. 2137.

¹⁵ Vasile Burja, Attila Tamas-Szora, and Iulian Bogdan Dobra, “Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Sustainable Development of Agriculture in Romania,” p. 2137

¹⁶ Vasile Burja, Attila Tamas-Szora, and Iulian Bogdan Dobra, “Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Sustainable Development of Agriculture in Romania,” p. 2137

¹⁷ Vasile Burja, Attila Tamas-Szora, and Iulian Bogdan Dobra, “Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Sustainable Development of Agriculture in Romania,” p. 2137.

Franco, and Jan Douwe van der Ploeg from the ECVC “Hands off the Land” initiative.¹⁸ Pocket contracts are defined as deals made between owners and sellers where both parties “[omit] the date of the purchase, and the contract is kept ‘in the pocket’ until the land moratorium [government ban of the sale of land] is lifted.”¹⁹ Hungarian land has also been a primary factor in large-scale fraud activity. According to HVG.hu, the nation’s leading online source for economic literature, one of the five most significant fraud scandals involved “Gruppo Milton”, a company that prepared businesses dealings for the Spanish real-estate firm named “Sedesa”.²⁰ This corporation “used what is known as the ‘Spanish method’ in Hungary. This means that the company lobbyist [...] builds excellent links with representatives from both sides of the political spectrum to ‘grab’ land belonging to the local authority, accompanied by grand promises to undertake mega-investment schemes.”²¹ This operation was made possible through several government officials that used state-owned funds to invest in the company’s construction and profit-focused processes, which the Hungarian Ministry of Finance eventually uncovered. This issue of fraud conducted by foreign investors and corrupt officials is only one of the many major fraudulent land-related scandals in Hungary.

In a report published in 2019, Noémi Gonda wrote about land consolidation that benefited Hungarian oligarchs in the wake of their new authoritarian government.²² At the fall of the communist regime in 1989, about 23 percent of Hungarian land was still owned and

¹⁸ Deborah Eade, *Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People’s Struggles in Europe*, ed. Jennifer Franco and Saturnino M. Borras, trans. Feodoroff Timothé (Transnational Institute (TNI), 2013), https://www.tni.org/files/download/land_in_europe-jun2013.pdf.

¹⁹ Deborah Eade, *Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People’s Struggles in Europe*, ed. Jennifer Franco and Saturnino M. Borras, trans. Feodoroff Timothé, p. 132.

²⁰ Deborah Eade, *Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People’s Struggles in Europe*, ed. Jennifer Franco and Saturnino M. Borras, trans. Feodoroff Timothé, p. 134.

²¹ Deborah Eade, *Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People’s Struggles in Europe*, ed. Jennifer Franco and Saturnino M. Borras, trans. Feodoroff Timothé, p. 134.

²² Noémi Gonda, “Land Grabbing and the Making of an Authoritarian Populist Regime in Hungary,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 46, no. 3 (2019): pp. 606-625, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2019.1584190>.

controlled by the state, which also had control over the next steps of Hungary's land reform processes.²³ Because officials had ownership, they chose to give out large amounts of land to potential and current oligarchs to fulfill their promises of granting them wealth.²⁴ The land distribution process was conducted in the form of land vouchers given to former owners of the commandeered land, but heavily favored rich and powerful officials or business owners.²⁵ Now, land distribution is heavily controlled by Hungary's authoritarian leaders.

Hungary is currently led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has held the role since 2010 and is arguably one of the main driving forces for land consolidation in the hands of the wealthy.²⁶ Land ownership was a large aspect of his campaign and a significant factor in his election success, evident in his actions during 2015, where he and other officials fulfilled their goals in a year-long "thunderstorm" of massive-land privatization.²⁸ Orbán has worked to spread the land that has not already been transferred to the hands of wealthy private entities or politicians through auctions.²⁹ Gonda documented how wealthy stakeholders "obtained 70 [percent] of the land put up for auction... [and that] smallholders (who obtained farms of less than 20 hectares) received less than nine [percent] of the territory put up for auction."³⁰ Additionally, these auctions did not operate fairly in any capacity, according to Gonda, who wrote "[c]alling the process an 'auction' has contributed to governmental propaganda; in fact,

²³ Noémi Gonda, "Land Grabbing and the Making of an Authoritarian Populist Regime in Hungary," p. 606-625.

²⁴ Noémi Gonda, "Land Grabbing and the Making of an Authoritarian Populist Regime in Hungary," p. 606-625.

²⁵ Noémi Gonda, "Land Grabbing and the Making of an Authoritarian Populist Regime in Hungary," p. 606-625.

²⁶ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Viktor Orbán." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 2, 2021.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Viktor-Orban>.

²⁷ Noémi Gonda, "Land Grabbing and the Making of an Authoritarian Populist Regime in Hungary," p. 606-625.

²⁸ Noémi Gonda, "Land Grabbing and the Making of an Authoritarian Populist Regime in Hungary," p. 606-625.

²⁹ Noémi Gonda, "Land Grabbing and the Making of an Authoritarian Populist Regime in Hungary," p. 606-625.

³⁰ Noémi Gonda, "Land Grabbing and the Making of an Authoritarian Populist Regime in Hungary," p. 606-625.

among the 12,000 hectares of land ‘put up for auction’,... nearly 65 percent was distributed without being auctioned.”³¹

The nation of Serbia, formerly part of socialist Yugoslavia, has experienced unique agrarian structures compared to the other nations in central and eastern Europe that have since departed from communist or socialist regimes. This is because Serbia served as one of the few nations that held collectivized, state-owned land simultaneously with numerous small, privately-owned farms. These farms were able to preserve their economic and cultural capital and a few managed to modernize without the funding of the socialized state.³² However, Serbia’s move away from its socialist structure in 1990, signified by the ratification of their 1990 Constitution, caused some fragmentation of land to occur and privatization processes to ensue.³³ These privatization processes handicapped poor farmers who could not mechanize their farms, forcing them to sell their property to entities that had the funding to modernize their practices.³⁴ Additionally, as Serbia slowly moved to mass privatization of all Serbian land, land consolidation occurred at a rapid rate, mostly through the purchasing of largescale farms that could afford the rising price of productive land.³⁵ Large landowners began to transition their large fields into industrial operations beginning in the 1970s, and by the early 2000s, about 80

³¹ Noémi Gonda, “Land Grabbing and the Making of an Authoritarian Populist Regime in Hungary,” p. 606-625.

³² S Šljukić and M Šljukić, “Sociological Aspects of the Transformation of Agrarian Structure of Serbia in 1990-2018,” *RUDN Journal of Sociology* 19, no. 2 (2019): p. 237, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2272-2019-19-2-235-243>.

³³ S Šljukić and M Šljukić, “Sociological Aspects of the Transformation of Agrarian Structure of Serbia in 1990-2018,” p. 239.

³⁴ S Šljukić and M Šljukić, “Sociological Aspects of the Transformation of Agrarian Structure of Serbia in 1990-2018,” p. 239.

³⁵ S Šljukić and M Šljukić, “Sociological Aspects of the Transformation of Agrarian Structure of Serbia in 1990-2018,” p. 239.

percent of land was being sold at a cost cheaper than the land's value.³⁶ Additionally, "two-thirds of buyers were the owners of big private companies."³⁷

According to Milenko Srećković, Serbia has tried to legally distribute land with aid from the Privatization Agency since their parliamentary election cycle in 2012 but has faced issues involving illegal sales of land due to "poorly defined" sale regulations.³⁸ Regulations that are clear enough to be understood as prohibiting land sale by foreign investors are not honored but instead bypassed by corporations that register their companies as domestic.³⁹ This process is used by many, including Ivica Todorčić, a tycoon from Croatia who owns Agrokor, a food and beverage manufacturing, and retail company. According to Srećković, Todorčić acquired "1,000 hectares by buying Frikom, and an additional 4,200 by acquiring Edible Oil Industry Dijaman... now cultivat[ing] a total of about 6,000 hectares".⁴⁰

Bulgaria, after its rapid revolution in 1989, also saw a speedy change in national structures.⁴¹ Bulgaria's rush to democratize its government and privatize its economy forced the nation into a deep recession and period of de-industrialization. This remained a reality throughout the 1990s, especially hitting the agricultural sector and causing widespread land fragmentation.⁴² Throughout recessions, Bulgarian land was important not only for farming

³⁶ S Šljukić and M Šljukić, "Sociological Aspects of the Transformation of Agrarian Structure of Serbia in 1990-2018," p. 239.

³⁷ S Šljukić and M Šljukić, "Sociological Aspects of the Transformation of Agrarian Structure of Serbia in 1990-2018," p. 239.

³⁸ Milenko Srećković, "Land Grabbing and Land Concentration in Europe: The Case of Serbia," in *Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People's Struggles in Europe.*, ed. Deborah Eade (e Transnational Institute (TNI) for European Coordination Via Campesina, OAD), p. 195.

³⁹ Milenko Srećković, "Land Grabbing and Land Concentration in Europe: The Case of Serbia," p. 195.

⁴⁰ Milenko Srećković, "Land Grabbing and Land Concentration in Europe: The Case of Serbia," p. 195.

⁴¹ Andrew Soergel, "How 1989 Reshaped Europe - US News & World Report," U.S. News and World Report, November 8, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2019-11-08/how-the-fall-of-communism-in-1989-reshaped-eastern-europe>.

⁴² Georgi Medarov, "Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Land Conflicts in Europe: the Case of Boynitsa in Bulgaria," ed. Deborah Eade, accessed March 7, 2022, https://landmatrix.org/media/uploads/land_in_europe.pdf#page=180.

careers but for feeding local families. This practice is still prevalent, seen in multiple studies that found that “more than 60 [percent] of the population was involved in regular extra-market food production... [and] that in 2008 alone, Bulgarians produced 208 million jars of homemade fruit and vegetable conserves.”⁴³ However, these small farms that support their communities are disappearing. A study focused on the decline of small farms in Europe found that from 1990 to 2013, the number of small farm variations was at -65 percent for central European nations, reflecting that land is being purchased by large conglomerates in agriculture and development, contributing to mass land consolidation.⁴⁴

Land reform not only fragmented land and promoted land grabbing, but affected economic incentives based on the amount of land owned. Because smaller farms received fewer incentives, rural degradation ensued, and land value decreased. Medarov noted that it was “economically more viable, from the point of view of the new and fragmented small-scale owners, to sell or lease their land to private investors.”⁴⁵ Large investors and special investment funds (SIFs), owned mostly by foreign investors, contributed to mass land consolidation because they utilized governmental support, such as subsidies from the EU that only coordinated with the amount of land owned and favor larger farming projects.⁴⁶ This inequality in funding from governments created a large disparity in funding between small farmers and large conglomerates.

After the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the price of Ukrainian land remained extremely low due to the former, “heavily subsidized and relatively inefficient” agricultural

⁴³ ⁴³ Georgi Medarov, “Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Land Conflicts in Europe: the Case of Boynitsa in Bulgaria,” accessed March 7, 2022.

⁴⁴ Sylvia Kay, “PDF” (Amsterdam, December 2016).

⁴⁵ Georgi Medarov, “Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Land Conflicts in Europe: The Case of Boynitsa in Bulgaria,” accessed March 7, 2022.

⁴⁶ Georgi Medarov, “Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and Land Conflicts in Europe: the Case of Boynitsa in Bulgaria,” accessed March 7, 2022.

structure and overall political instability that accompanied the nation.⁴⁷ This, coupled with the abundant fertility that Ukraine contains, made its land incredibly popular with agricultural institutions around the world. As of 2014, a study found that over 1.6 million hectares of Ukrainian land were “under the control of foreign-based corporations (Oakland institute), including those based in Texas, France, Denmark, UK” or owned by foreign investors originating from countries such as Saudi Arabia.⁴⁸ The popularity of Ukrainian land has skyrocketed its price, making it equal to that of western land in terms of attraction from corporations. One example of these corporations includes NCH Capital, a US pension fund that was one of the earliest investors of Ukrainian land. Fraser states that “the company has systematically leased out small parcels of agricultural land (around two to six hectares in size) across Ukraine, aggregating these into large-scale farms that now operate industrially.”⁴⁹

International entities have played a part in aiding foreign agribusiness with large-scale loans, thus helping billionaires fill their pockets with even more profit to buy land out from under small farmers. In 2015, Claire Provost and Matt Kennard noted that the World Bank was granting loans to support the development of million-dollar agricultural corporations, such as Myronivsky Hliboproduct.⁵⁰ The funding is not going towards the development of fertile and profitable cropland but to the development efforts of businesses that are using land for industrial practices or animal-based food production.⁵¹ Provost and Kennard, referring to the World Bank’s

⁴⁷ Anatolii Kucher, “Soil Fertility, Financial Support, and Sustainable Competitiveness: Evidence from Ukraine,” *Agricultural and Resource Economics: International Scientific E-Journal* 6, no. 2 (2020): p. 5-23, <https://doi.org/10.51599/are.2020.06.02.01>.

⁴⁸ “Who Owns Agricultural Land in Ukraine?,” Accessed March 7, 2022.

⁴⁹ “Who Owns Agricultural Land in Ukraine?,” Accessed March 7, 2022.

⁵⁰ Claire Provost, “Ukraine Agribusiness Firms in 'Quiet Land Grab' with Development Finance,” *The Guardian*, July 30, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jul/30/ukraine-agribusiness-firms-quiet-land-grab-development-finance>.

⁵¹ Claire Provost, “Ukraine Agribusiness Firms in 'Quiet Land Grab' with Development Finance,” *The Guardian*, July 30, 2015.

128-million-euro loan given to Myronivsky Hliboproduct, stated “[m]uch of this funding has gone to support the building of Europe’s largest industrial chicken farm in the middle of Ukraine’s rural heartland... part of an audacious effort to transform the country once known as “Europe’s breadbasket” into its ‘meatbasket’.”⁵² While private investors argue that these investments are creating jobs and promoting food security in the area, many locals have spoken out against this, saying that their voices are not being considered, their land is being ecologically destroyed, and their homes are being physically impacted.⁵³ Locals say that “fields to grow crops [are used to] to feed the chickens and incubators for eggs. Industrialization is still expanding, and this expansion requires leasing extra land from nearby villages to construct more ‘rearing zones’ for chickens and additional grain facilities.”⁵⁴ When asked about land acquisition for these large projects, small community members said that “people are being pressured into giving their land over to the project by signing long-term land leases.”⁵⁵ One of the villagers from the Ukrainian town of Olyanitsa claimed that the cracks in his brick walls originated from the vibrations of construction projects and large trucks driving down their small roads, creating significant damage.⁵⁶

Each of these nations, during their stages of privatization, has faced manipulation by foreign investors, wealthy corporations, or corrupt government officials who do not consider the impact of their efforts. However, their actions have heavily affected national markets, the

⁵² Claire Provost, “Ukraine Agribusiness Firms in 'Quiet Land Grab' with Development Finance,” *The Guardian*, July 30, 2015.

⁵³ Claire Provost, “Ukraine Agribusiness Firms in 'Quiet Land Grab' with Development Finance,” *The Guardian*, July 30, 2015.

⁵⁴ Claire Provost, “Ukraine Agribusiness Firms in 'Quiet Land Grab' with Development Finance,” *The Guardian*, July 30, 2015.

⁵⁵ Claire Provost, “Ukraine Agribusiness Firms in 'Quiet Land Grab' with Development Finance,” *The Guardian*, July 30, 2015.

⁵⁶ Claire Provost, “Ukraine Agribusiness Firms in 'Quiet Land Grab' with Development Finance,” *The Guardian*, July 30, 2015.

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environment, and local regions that rely on small farming for subsistence. The land owned by large entities, while celebrated through fiscal rewards or subsidies from international policies, acts as a tool for larger corporate farms to overwhelm smaller farms. When this occurs, farmers lose their ability to control their food production and distribution, and the overall food sovereignty of their community.

Food Sovereignty and its Link to European Land Occupation

LVC has made serious contributions to food insecurity research, expanding the idea through the creation of “food sovereignty,” a concept that they proposed during the World Food Summit of 1996.⁵⁷ Food sovereignty is defined by LVC as the “peoples,’ countries’ or State Unions’ [right] to define their agricultural and food policy”, and specifically includes “the right of farmers and peasants to produce food and the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced.”⁵⁸ This definition considers the communities that use farming as an occupation while also using their product as a food source to support the overall health needs of their commonwealth. When that control is challenged by the commodification of resources and the overthrow of small farmers by large corporations, as seen in instances of land occupation, small communities that can no longer control their food source succumb to food that debilitates the health and prosperity of their society. These detrimental food products can come from imports from foreign nations or from large corporate farms that primarily focus on cash crops, such as corn and wheat, that do not provide rural communities with the nutrition they need. One example of this change in diet due to land grabbing is evident with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous locals are large importers of commercialized food and

⁵⁷ “Food Sovereignty: Via Campesina,” Via Campesina English (La Via Campesina: International Peasants' Movement, January 15, 2003), <https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty/>.

⁵⁸ “Food Sovereignty: Via Campesina,” Via Campesina English (La Via Campesina: International Peasants' Movement, January 15, 2003), <https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty/>.

continue to face hunger because they do not have the power to decide how their food is made, what resources they have access to, and how to localize their food system to benefit their nutritional needs. For farmers to have control over the production of their food, they require control of land that allows them to make decisions based on the needs of their communities and a say on food production and distribution. Once this shift in control of land occurs, food sovereignty can be achieved.

Food sovereignty is a main topic for debate in LVC's annual reports, while the better-known concept of "food security" has taken a backseat. This is because food security, while helpful in understanding hunger, is not enough to functionally support the peasant farming industry and the communities they serve. Remy Herrera and Kin Chi Lau talk about food security as an "inadequate narrative that forces peasant communities to 'rely' on international trade to cover the deficit in their food requirements" and grow rental commercial crops that will not feed the community effectively.⁵⁹ They also discuss that food sovereignty is a more complete concept because it includes conversations about labor and land support for farming communities and agricultural processes that can preserve the environment, unlike the food systems supported by food security.

Food security practices have not shown up in peasant farming areas with higher hunger rates as processes granting affordable, nutritious food that the community can grow from. Instead, it is executed as industrialization by large agribusinesses that strip the global peasantry of their land and control of their food system.⁶⁰ These processes are reflective of the northern hemisphere's family farming structure that follows the practices encouraged by neoliberalism.

⁵⁹ Rémy Herrera and Kin Chi Lau, *The Struggle for Food Sovereignty Alternative Development and the Renewal of Peasant Societies Today* (Pluto Press, 2015). p.

⁶⁰ Rémy Herrera and Kin Chi Lau, *The Struggle for Food Sovereignty Alternative Development and the Renewal of Peasant Societies Today*. p.

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While these farms do not utilize these practices with neoliberalism explicitly in mind, they conform to the practices that neoliberalism supports, further preserving the neoliberal ideal that plagues the agricultural community. The northern family farming structure also utilizes inherently neoliberal elements⁶¹ in that income of farmers is “squeezed between supermarkets, agribusiness, and banking... [because their income] is collected by segments of commercial, industrial, and financial capital, implying that their remuneration does not correspond to their productivity.”⁶² The northern family farming model is completely unable to be replicated in the Global South, which relies on subsistence farming and therefore sees a surge in land-grabbing by large corporations who rely on that structure to function but need the space to do so. These corporations find the resources they need at the periphery of the global agricultural market: peasantry land.⁶³ Land, if understood in the terms of food security and being used in the northern family farming model, can fall under the perspective of simply being a tool for production in a factory-like environment.⁶⁴ Food sovereignty and its link to land are apparent in terms of how the resource supports the concept but is not often noticed by food security activists. This is because food security campaigns for the alleviation of hunger by increased food access and production but do not discuss how food security begins or how nutrition and control come into play. Evidence shows that even with food security efforts, community members continue to deteriorate because, while food supply and access are enough, it does not scratch the surface of how food impacts rural communities.

⁶¹ The practices used in the northern family farming model were understood and practiced before the rise of neoliberalism, and therefore are not strictly neoliberal. However, the practices best follow the laws of the neoliberal economic system, and their current popularity can be attributed to the rise of support for neoliberalism in agriculture.

⁶² Rémy Herrera and Kin Chi Lau, *The Struggle for Food Sovereignty Alternative Development and the Renewal of Peasant Societies Today* (Pluto Press, 2015), p. 3.

⁶³ Rémy Herrera and Kin Chi Lau, *The Struggle for Food Sovereignty Alternative Development and the Renewal of Peasant Societies Today*. p. 5

⁶⁴ Rémy Herrera and Kin Chi Lau, *The Struggle for Food Sovereignty Alternative Development and the Renewal of Peasant Societies Today*, p.

Crop diversity and agroecology also play an influential role in the preservation of land and food sovereignty. These are concepts that the agricultural peasantry must focus on for their livelihood to flourish while large agricultural companies choose to denigrate land for an economic benefit. Because corporations hold the belief that land destruction does not outweigh the capitalist benefit, they do not even begin to consider the impacts that their work will have on land viability in the future. These agricultural companies also understand that because they hold an advantage through international policies, they can simply acquire more land once small farmers are forced to surrender that land due to lack of affordability. None of these ideas ensure the success of food sovereignty, which requires on the preservation and viability of land throughout future generations who will rely on food sovereignty to survive.

La Via Campesina's Mission and Structure

The world of agricultural advocacy would not be what it is today without the diligence and work of the movement, LVC. LVC was officially established in 1993 by a group of food rights activists at a conference in Mons, Belgium and has increased awareness of food sovereignty and how that connects with every part of life. According to Marc Edelman, LVC advocates for the “peasantry”, which includes “rural workers and small and medium-size cultivators in developing countries to small and medium-size commercial farmers in the developed North.”⁶⁵ They also acknowledge the diversity in the communities they support and how each actor, whether it be a farmer from Europe or a rural community member from the global South, has a unique perspective and faces extremely different outcomes through impacts from policies. Because of this, LVC remains cautious about overtly supporting specific

⁶⁵ Marc Edelman, “What Is a Peasant? What Are Peasantries? A Briefing Paper on Issues of Definition,” July 15, 2013, <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/wgpleasants/edelman.pdf>.

legislation. This caution does not stifle their voice, however, which reaches all parts of the planet. LVC has expanded into 81 countries, from Asia to the Americas. They actively work toward the protection of global agricultural peasantry rights and liberties and document various perpetrators or systems in place that disproportionately affect small farming communities. The organization's pillars of advocacy are seen in various initiatives that it focuses on every year in their annual reports, such as the fight against neoliberal policies, climate change, peasantry women, and youth involvement.⁶⁶

LVC is fundamentally against neoliberal policies, arguing against the concept's encouragement of capitalist economic structures, such as specific free trade agreements that result in disadvantaging small community farmers or limits on government regulation in national economies. Neoliberalism is defined as the political philosophy that national markets should be "robustly liberal and capitalist... [endorsing] the free-market economy to protect freedom and promote economic prosperity."⁶⁷ The philosophy extends to global trade relations, where free-trade agreements and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) are encouraged. From the perspective of this ideal, land is seen as a commodity that plays a profitable role in the global economy and therefore should also not be regulated by the processes of privatization.

Free trade agreements were originally made with the understanding that they would provide trade support to smaller, developing nations and act as a mechanism to bolster economies by giving their goods "free access... to the largest market in the world."⁶⁸ Guntra A. Aistara wrote on the early reaches of free trade agreements in nations such as Costa Rica and

⁶⁶ *La Via Campesina, International Peasantry Movement. Annual Report 2020*. Eastlea, Harare, Zimbabwe: La Via Campesina, 2020.

⁶⁷ Vallier, Kevin, "Neoliberalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/neoliberalism>.

⁶⁸ Aistara, Guntra A. *Organic Sovereignties: Struggles Over Farming in an Age of Free Trade*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018, p. 59.

Latvia, stating that, as they grew in popularity, “entering a free trade region was presented as logical, wise, and necessary by governments and supporters.”⁶⁹ It was understood that “[t]he idea that a small country could exist independently alongside, but outside of, the proposed free trade regions were deemed preposterous[.]”⁷⁰ Now, however, free trade agreements hurt small farmers by granting cuts on tariffs and agricultural export regulations. These actions allow transnational agricultural corporations (TNCs) to evade costs, giving them a financial advantage and fundamentally disenfranchising the peasantry.

Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) are also significant parts of the neoliberal ideology. Defined as “package[s] of policies associated with loans to [developing nations] by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank,” SAPs’ main function is to boost foreign trade through deregulation of markets and privatization that encourages an increased “technical efficiency of production.”⁷¹ When SAPs encourage larger exports and lower the cost of production through subsidies, they create a model that does not differentiate small farmers from large agribusiness. Therefore, large businesses focus on pushing food out of the country and getting subsidies from the government that allow them to take over large portions of the market while small farmers are pushed out of the market because of price controls on products that place them at a perpetual profit deficit. Herrera, when writing on the impact of SAPs in rural communities stated that “SAPs exacerbated extroversion, extraction of surplus-value, land concentration, food imports, and aid dependency”⁷²

⁶⁹ Aistara, Guntra A. *Organic Sovereignties: Struggles Over Farming in an Age of Free Trade*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018, p. 58.

⁷⁰ Aistara, Guntra A. *Organic Sovereignties: Struggles Over Farming in an Age of Free Trade*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018, p. 58-9.

⁷¹ “Structural Adjustment,” Oxford Reference, accessed February 6, 2022, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100538684>.

⁷² Rémy Herrera and Kin Chi Lau, *The Struggle for Food Sovereignty Alternative Development and the Renewal of Peasant Societies Today*, p. 7.

LVC continues to work in anti-neoliberal advocacy, backing those who find flaws in government legislation that supports the neoliberal ideal. One event about this was LVC's backing of UN member Michael Fakhri's report on the World Trade Organization (WTO).⁷³ Fakhri wrote that the WTO is marginalizing small farming systems around the world and recommended that a right-to food system, where individuals have the right to control the production distribution of their food, would be a better choice, thus encouraging an agricultural model that promotes food sovereignty.⁷⁴ LVC is critical of policies made by the European Union (EU), such as CAP, because of the overall financial disadvantage they place on all agricultural community members.⁷⁵ In a statement on agrarian reform, LVC called for the alliance of the urban poor and the exploited rural peasantry, urging these groups to join the fight, not simply for the right for traditional agrarian reform but for reform to include "include major changes in the overall 'policy environment' for peasant agriculture (trade, credit, crop insurance, education, democratic access to water and seeds, other support services, etc.)"⁷⁶

LVC highlights women, who, by their statistics, produce 70 percent of the world's food.⁷⁷ LVC's support is evident in their consistent inclusion of female farming advocacy in their summit reports and on their website, where they have a section devoted to literary works about

⁷³ Rémy Herrera and Kin Chi Lau, *The Struggle for Food Sovereignty Alternative Development and the Renewal of Peasant Societies Today*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ Free Trade Agreements, Key Documents (WTO), "La Via Campesina Backs the UN Special Rapporteur's Observation That WTO Policies Have Marginalized People's Human Rights Concerns: Via Campesina." Via Campesina English. La Via Campesina: International Peasants' Movement, October 8, 2020. <https://viacampesina.org/en/la-via-campesina-backs-the-un-special-rapporteurs-observation-that-wto-policies-have-marginalised-peoples-human-rights-concerns/>.

⁷⁵ "The Trade Policy Review and the Cap Reform: Incongruences and Incoherencies: Via Campesina," Via Campesina English (La Via Campesina: International Peasants' Movement, August 24, 2021), <https://viacampesina.org/en/the-trade-policy-review-and-the-cap-reform-incongruences-and-incoherencies/>.

⁷⁶ Peter Rosset, "Popular Agrarian Reform: The New Call for Agrarian Reform in the 21st Century," *New Challenges and Strategies in the Defense of Land and Territory: The Land Research Action Network Briefing Paper Series 4* (2018): p. 81-87.

⁷⁷ "The International Peasants' Voice: Via Campesina," Via Campesina English (La Via Campesina: International Peasants' Movement, October 13, 2020), <https://viacampesina.org/en/international-peasants-voice/>.

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women in rural farming. They have also mobilized by creating forums for women to use their voices and participate in the planning and execution of conferences. LVC's 2019 Annual report wrote that "The VI CLOC Women's Assembly brought together women delegates of member organizations from 21 countries... during the June VII Congress of the Latin America Coordination of Peasant Organizations, the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (CLOC)-Via Campesina.... women reaffirmed their commitment to resist the patriarchal and capitalist systems that violate their rights and plunders their resources."⁷⁸ LVC views the patriarchy as a system that not only affects women and people of diverse genders but as a concept that affects men as well. Their argument states that to remove binding forces against women and those of diverse gender identities, we must also promote the freedom of men from the restrictions of patriarchy. Everyone must benefit equitably from feminist empowerment practices in agriculture for female farmers to have a voice in rural agriculture.

Women play a vital role in advocacy as individual leaders, coming from an abundance of different demographics and providing different perspectives on agricultural advocacy work. Women are included by LVC members in educational opportunities by teaching other women the importance of food for themselves and their community. Women have participated in conversations about their rights on the national level by communicating with their national governments and several committees in the UN and FAO.⁷⁹ LVC has noted that women in several regions "have built a universal, broad, democratic movement committed to the defense of peasant agriculture, food sovereignty and the struggle for land, territory, justice, equality, and dignity for women and men in the countryside."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ La Via Campesina, International Peasantry Movement. *Annual Report 2019*. p. 34.

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Women hold a unique position as rural farmers regarding their right to land. Bina Agarwal has presented countless studies on the role of rural women farmers in India, documenting the struggles that this demographic faces. In her study on gender and land rights in India, she wrote that rural female farmers have faced a long history of struggles for land rights.⁸¹ According to Agarwal, interventions for land rights for women began in the late '70s and '80s, and included “the best-known grassroots interventions [which] were two peasant movements: the Bodhgaya movement in Bihar...in 1978 and the Shetkari Sangathana’s movement for farmer’s rights... in Maharashtra in 1980.”⁸² Now, even with the extensive shift to industrial agriculture in India, 75 percent of all female workers and 85 percent of rural female workers remain in agriculture in contrast to the 53 percent of all male workers in agriculture.⁸³ Agarwal wrote that the relationship between land ownership and poverty in rural areas is closely linked, citing that land access indirectly and directly benefits women in several ways. For example, “[d]irect advantages can stem from growing crops or fodder or trees. Indirect advantages can take various forms: owned land can serve as collateral for credit or as a mortgageable or saleable asset during a crisis...[I]and... increases the probability of finding supplementary wage employment, enhances bargaining power with employers, [and] pushes up aggregate real wage rates[.]”⁸⁴ Because these individuals are significantly more vulnerable to debilitating living conditions, having land can provide them with more protection and support, as opposed to investors who already have financial support and simply view land as a commodity. More importantly, land

⁸¹ Bina Agarwal, “Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 3, no. 1-2 (2003): p. 185, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0366.00054>.

⁸² Bina Agarwal, “Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market,” p. 185.

⁸³ Bina Agarwal, “Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market,” p. 192.

⁸⁴ Bina Agarwal, “Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market,” p. 194.

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ownership is significant for women due to income spending patterns and access to necessities within the household. The possibility of poverty is less likely when women have “direct access to income and resources” rather than indirect access through a man in the household.⁸⁵ Therefore, land access is crucial to the success of rural women and their families in terms of poverty prevention and food sovereignty.⁸⁶

LVC actively contributes to the global conversation around agriculture and climate change. This is through declarations against governmental operations that diminish work conducted to preserve the planet. They support and participate in climate justice, arguing that climate change, if not checked, will contribute to erratic weather conditions that then cause mass migration. This mass migration, because it is due to climate change-induced weather events, would not give time for nations to properly prepare for migrant support, therefore causing more displacement of individuals. In terms of land, these climate change events would not only displace peoples and put pressure on the agricultural systems of migrant destinations but would also have the potential to ruin established farming systems in the migrants’ original homes. This would occur by the destruction of arable land in weather crises, making the land unusable for agriculture in the future.

LVC’s 2020 annual report spoke on their work surrounding climate support, specifically noting their role in the UN Climate Change Conference of 2019 (COP25) as well as afterward. The LVC branch Confédération Paysanne in France continued to “denounce” traditional economic structures due to their violation of the basic premises of the Paris Climate

⁸⁵ Bina Agarwal, “Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market,” p. 194.

⁸⁶ Bina Agarwal, “Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market,” p. 194.

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Agreement.”⁸⁷ LVC’s work has centered on the impacts of environmental pollution of land, water, and air from systems that do not recognize the negative effects their actions have on global ecosystems.⁸⁸ LVC has held pre-conference meetings led by the International Coordination Committee (ICC) for Central America, events that have led them to speak out about their support for those impacted by natural disasters, such as the destruction caused by Hurricane Eta. Most recently, LVC has published information against carbon markets that originate from traditional agribusinesses and transnational corporations that, as LVC states, are significant culprits of pollution. This work will specifically contribute to future conversations and campaigns connected to COP26.

LVC’s work with the global youth is reflective of their belief that the youth peasantry population is the future of agriculture.⁸⁹ Their mission is to support, educate, and rally young community members as rural agriculture’s future farmers and give their initiatives new voices that can carry on the work of food advocacy for generations to come. Work with young populations is primarily seen in their annual Youth Assembly, held by a different regional branch each year, and conferences that include facilitation of discussion from young minds in LVC regions. LVC encourages education about peasantry rights, the advocacy of LVC, and their vision for the future of rural agriculture. This has propelled young members to be active outside of LVC’s conferences, where they have played an active role in public policy reform through the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Youth members continue to participate in meetings held by the International Steering Committee (ISC) through the UN Decade of Family Farming, a program held by several governments, FAO, and the International

⁸⁷ La Via Campesina, International Peasantry Movement. *Annual Report 2020*. Eastlea, Harare, Zimbabwe: La Via Campesina, 2020, p. 18.

⁸⁸ La Via Campesina, International Peasantry Movement. *Annual Report 2020*, p. 18.

⁸⁹ La Via Campesina, International Peasantry Movement. *Annual Report 2020*, p. 18.

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Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). LVC's work with youth has opened more conversations on the roles of youth, women, and LGBTQIA individuals in agriculture.

Throughout the development and expansion of LVC, agroecology, seeds, and biodiversity have been primary components of their movement, evident through the early development of agroecology schools in local communities.⁹⁰ LVC stated that “[f]or over 25 years, political and technical training has been a strategic priority of La Via Campesina (LVC)” and that “La Via Campesina has more than 70 schools and training processes based on popular education, which is a method and an approach that puts forward the scaling up of agroecology at the territorial level and the strengthening of peoples’ food sovereignty.”⁹¹ LVC members, who have formed the international work for the workforce for agroecology, create the curriculum for schools and training.⁹² LVC teaches that for agroecology to become a staple in policy reform, it has to be viewed as an “organizational-political practice”, and include the participation of women, youth, and the methods ingrained in popular education.⁹³ Their workforce has been the main subject in their advocacy publications and has reported on the progress agroecology schools have made throughout each year, emphasizing “peasant- to- peasant education and the protection of seed systems.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ La Via Campesina. “La Via Campesina Agroecology Training Schools and Processes: Via Campesina,” Via Campesina English (La Via Campesina: International Peasants' Movement, October 15, 2019), <https://viacampesina.org/en/schools/>.

⁹¹ La Via Campesina. “La Via Campesina Agroecology Training Schools and Processes: Via Campesina,” Accessed 17 March 2022.

⁹² La Via Campesina. “La Via Campesina Agroecology Training Schools and Processes: Via Campesina,” Accessed 17 March 2022.

⁹³ La Via Campesina. “La Via Campesina Agroecology Training Schools and Processes: Via Campesina,” Accessed 17 March 2022.

⁹⁴ La Via Campesina, International Peasants’ Movement. Annual Report 2019. p. 19.

Their education is not only focused on agroecology in terms of seed or crop diversity, but on the biodiversity of nature, specifically in land preservation.⁹⁵ When large agribusinesses use land, they simultaneously produce record quantities of crops and completely strip the land of its nutrients through reliance on pesticides, fertilizers, and preventative probiotics.⁹⁶ They kill the biodiversity of land through these practices, known as industrial agriculture.⁹⁷ LVC fights against this agricultural practice by educating peasants on the importance of retaining ownership of land, how to grow crops responsibly, and giving these peasants a voice in the process of education of agroecology on an international level.⁹⁸

Migrant workers are some of the most passionate members of LVC, making their voices heard and contributing to the organization's overall mission. In 2019, LVC documented that "2019 was another year of organized resistance by migrant workers worldwide...migrant movements across the globe led social processes aimed at defending their human, migrant, and peasant rights."⁹⁹ The driving forces included the recent passing of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), a success for LVC, and the establishment of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), which LVC argues does nothing to aid migrant workers.¹⁰⁰ They believe GCM is actually a "step-back" in protecting

⁹⁵ La Via Campesina. "La Via Campesina Agroecology Training Schools and Processes: Via Campesina," Accessed 17 March 2022.

⁹⁶ Emile Frison, "From Industrial Agriculture to Diversified Agroecological Systems," *Indian Journal of Plant Genetic Resources* 29, no. 3 (2016): p. 237, <https://doi.org/10.5958/0976-1926.2016.00033.4>.

⁹⁷ Emile Frison, "From Industrial Agriculture to Diversified Agroecological Systems," Accessed 17 March 2022.

⁹⁸ La Via Campesina, International Peasants' Movement. Annual Report 2019. p. 15.

⁹⁹ La Via Campesina, International Peasants' Movement. Annual Report 2019. p. 27.

¹⁰⁰ La Via Campesina. "Global Compact for Migration (GCM) Does Not Represent a Change in the Current Offensive against Migrants and Refugees : La Via Campesina," *Via Campesina English (La Via Campesina: International Peasants' Movement, December 17, 2018)*, <https://viacampesina.org/en/global-compact-for-migration-gcm-does-not-represent-a-change-in-the-current-offensive-against-migrants-and-refugees-la-via-campesina/>.

migrants and migrant workers from anti-migration policies and, as LVC states, “current offensives against migrants and refugees being waged by many [s]tates”.¹⁰¹

In Europe, strikes of migrant workers have prompted LVC and its European counterparts to make declarations against the actions of agricultural employers and their exploitation of migrant workers.¹⁰² LVC focuses on worker intermediation and the impacts migrant workers face from recent employer actions that restrict and exploit migrants. In their report, LVC stated that “workforce intermediation is a structural feature of [labor] relations in the agricultural sector; its consolidation corresponding with the expansion of the agro-industry within the capitalist system, and, thus, of a deterioration in the living and working conditions of foreign workforces.”¹⁰³ Workforce intermediation refers to a situation in which an employer and employee are connected with an intermediary, whose role is “to facilitate the matching of supply and demand and/or to connect several natural or legal persons with complementary interests in an economic, financial or commercial transaction”.¹⁰⁴ LVC argues that this third person allows for discrepancies in the treatment of migrant workers and the violation of contract rights (regular payments, overtime, etc.).¹⁰⁵ In addition to migrating from their homes due to displacement issues, migrants are struggling for their worker rights to be honored fairly in their new home.

Land plays a large role in the process of migrant displacement and labor exploitation. In the declaration made by ECVC, they created a series of required events in the construction of migrant workforces that are then prey to unfair working standards. One of these required events in the process of displacement is land concentration.¹⁰⁶ Their event series argues that the

¹⁰¹ La Via Campesina. “Global Compact for Migration (GCM) Does Not Represent a Change in the Current Offensive against Migrants and Refugees: La Via Campesina,” Accessed March 2, 2022.

¹⁰² La Via Campesina, International Peasants’ Movement. Annual Report 2019. p. 28.

¹⁰³ Andres Arce Indacochea, “PDF” (Brussels, Belgium, November 2019) p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Andres Arce Indacochea, “PDF,” p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Andres Arce Indacochea, “PDF,” p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Andres Arce Indacochea, “PDF,” p. 3.

industrialization of farming in Europe causes a reduction of small farming businesses due to land concentration, therefore displacing farmers who used to own that land.¹⁰⁷ industrialization creates a surplus of mass production and migrant workers are needed to run production development. Because migrant workers are in an unstable conditions, such as living conditions that make them vulnerable to exploitation in the job market and are specialized in farming, one of their few options is to succumb to working for these large agricultural corporations.¹⁰⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the most recent features in LVC's 2020 annual report and has caused unforeseen issues involving the food system and mobilization of food sovereignty advocacy.¹⁰⁹ LVC's work has evolved into radio podcasts and online meetings due to the decrease in in-person events. According to LVC, the main problem is the struggle for seamless execution of operations through the internet. They must accommodate time zones, languages, and internet access for members to attend meetings and events. LVC has worked in providing translators and continuing their attendance in UN or FAO hearings but has faced obstacles, such as a lack of online participation from member organizations and rural community members. However, LVC has remained up to date on various issue statuses through social media and virtual news operations.

LVC has also spoken about the status of COVID-19 as a symptom of capitalism and the degradation of public health in the 20th century. Since the beginning of industrialization, economic structures and their "friendly governments" have allowed transnational corporations to expand their efforts at the expense of the global population.¹¹⁰ LVC argues that "promoters of

¹⁰⁷ Andres Arce Indacochea, "PDF," p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Andres Arce Indacochea, "PDF," p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ La Via Campesina, International Peasantry Movement. *Annual Report 2020*. Eastlea, Harare, Zimbabwe: La Via Campesina, 2020, p. 5-6.

¹¹⁰ La Via Campesina "Replug: Peasants Rights Explained: An Illustrated Version of the UN Declaration (UNDROP)! : Via Campesina," Via Campesina English, September 24, 2021, <https://viacampesina.org/en/undrop-illustrations/>.

[globalization] framed [f]ree [t]rade [a]greements that encouraged the [privatization] of public services and deregulation – eventually crumbling public health systems and pushing rural and urban communities into extreme vulnerabilities.”¹¹¹ This privatization forced individuals who cannot afford help to live with their circumstances while governments ignored the warnings of rural populations and the overall “civilized society.”¹¹² LVC argues that “[c]apitalism created this [polarized] world, where competition replaced solidarity.”¹¹³ However, they also state that hope is not completely lost for rural communities impacted by COVID-19 and abandoned by their state government. With the solidarity incorporated in LVC, the organization argues that rural communities can aid each other in COVID-19 relief and collectively push back against capitalist governmental systems that exacerbates the already established polarity.

LVC’s European Branch: European Coordination Via Campesina

Because LVC is a global network, they have satellite groups in Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Their European satellite organization, named “European Coordination Via Campesina” (ECVC) was a merger between two European grassroots organizations, Coordination Paysanne Européenne (CPE) and COAG (Coordination of Farmer and Livestock Owner Organisations from Spain) in 2008 ¹¹⁴. ECVC, a mobilization of 27 different organizations, focuses strongly on agricultural policies in the European Union that disproportionately affect small farms, such as CAP, and on solidarity in farming instead of the traditional economic method of competition in

¹¹¹ La Via Campesina “Replug: Peasants Rights Explained: An Illustrated Version of the UN Declaration (UNDROP)!: Via Campesina,” Accessed 17 March 2022.

¹¹² ¹¹² La Via Campesina “Replug: Peasants Rights Explained: An Illustrated Version of the UN Declaration (UNDROP)!: Via Campesina,” Accessed 17 March 2022.

¹¹³ La Via Campesina “Replug: Peasants Rights Explained: An Illustrated Version of the UN Declaration (UNDROP)!: Via Campesina,” Accessed 17 March 2022.

¹¹⁴ European Coordination Via Campesina, “Our History,” European Coordination Via Campesina (European Coordination Via Campesina), accessed November 26, 2021, <https://www.eurovia.org/about/our-history/>.

the agricultural sector.¹¹⁵ In November 2021, ECVC assumed the General Secretariat position of La Via Campesina, signaling a new advocacy focus on social and environmental agriculture¹¹⁶. ECVC runs multiple campaigns that center on topics involving food sovereignty, such as the Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Food Sovereignty Network (Nyéléni ECA), CAP and small-scale farmers, Vacdiva, and Hands on the Land.¹¹⁷

Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Food Sovereignty Network (Nyéléni ECA) is a networking branch of ECVC that connects “farmers, fishers, pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples, consumers, NGOs, trade unions, environmental/development research, Justice/Solidarity/Human Rights Organizations, [and] community-based food movements” that work as a unit to advocate for food sovereignty initiatives on a “local, national, regional and global” scale.¹¹⁸ Nyéléni ECA holds forums all over the world, beginning with their first official forum in Mali in 2007, in places such as Krems, Austria, and Romania. These forums serve to bring organizations in the two regions together to discuss current their current activism, create future collaboration opportunities, and foster an increase to protect their current systems of farming so resources such as land are less likely to be removed from the hands of farmers. Nyéléni ECA originally operated strictly in Europe but has extended membership to central Asian nations, which has given them the bi-regional program they have today.¹¹⁹The internal structure of Nyéléni ECA consists of a

¹¹⁵ European Coordination Via Campesina. “Agricultural Policy.” European Coordination Via Campesina. European Coordination Via Campesina. Accessed November 23, 2021. <https://www.eurovia.org/main-issue/agricultural-policy/>.

¹¹⁶ European Coordination Via Campesina, “Transition Ceremony: ECVC Takes over the General Secretariat of La Via Campesina,” European Coordination Via Campesina (European Coordination Via Campesina), accessed November 26, 2021, <https://www.eurovia.org/transition-ceremony-ecvc-takes-over-the-general-secretariat-of-la-via-campesina/>.

¹¹⁷ European Coordination Via Campesina, “Campaigns,” European Coordination Via Campesina (European Coordination Via Campesina), accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.eurovia.org/campaigns/>.

¹¹⁸ European Coordination Via Campesina, “Nyéléni-ECA,” European Coordination Via Campesina (European Coordination Via Campesina), accessed December 24, 2021, <https://www.eurovia.org/campaign/nyeleni/>.

¹¹⁹ European Coordination Via Campesina, “Nyéléni-ECA,” European Coordination Via Campesina (European Coordination Via Campesina).

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facilitation committee, technical secretariat, workgroups, and contact people.¹²⁰ The facilitation committee is comprised of organizations in the region that evenly represent the region's demographics. The representative appointment process involves a nomination period and a choosing period where each organization's constituency decides on the outcome of the appointment. The facilitation committee meets annually or bi-annually each committee member serves a two-year term. The technical secretariat is chosen to serve on the facilitation committee in communication, policy execution, aid with workgroups, and fundraising endeavors. This person also serves as the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) secretariat and acts as a bridge between the Facilitation Committee and the IPC structure. Workgroups act as the think tanks for Nyéléni ECA, remaining flexible in structure and providing open participation from all organizations in the region. The workgroup members bring new ideas to the Facilitation Committee, which are then distributed through the technical secretariat to the region. These groups also work on fundraising efforts and the implementation of new work practices for regional members. Contact people serve as the messengers of information from the Facilitation committee to the region. They work with the technical secretariat and workgroups to disseminate information and act as points of contact for organizations. These organizations can provide feedback to the facilitation committee and identify individuals on the national level to aid organizations that require a follow-up in practice implementation. Contact people are the soundboard for their regional constituents.

The members of Nyéléni ECA have most recently created a declaration and executive plan for their food sovereignty reform that discusses the issues behind the policies they oppose.

¹²⁰ "Structure and Operation of the NYÉLÉNI ECA Network," Structure and operation of the Nyéléni ECA Network (Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia), accessed December 26, 2021, <https://nyeleni-eca.net/structure-and-operation-nyeleni-eca-network>.

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They state that under the capitalist model, the agricultural world is industrialized and controlled by a small number of transnational corporations who are only focused on profit and generating the cheapest product for the highest profit. This, they argue, leads to “enormous loss of agricultural holdings and the people who make their living from those holdings,... promotes a diet which is harmful to health [,] and... contains insufficient fruit, vegetables [,] and cereals.”¹²¹ Nyéléni ECA writes on how this model relies on finite resources and lacks sustainability practices that value the planet. Nyéléni ECA calls for a list of remedies for the EU, stating that to prevent the issue from worsening, there need to be changes in food production and distribution, improvements to labor and social conditions in the agricultural workplace, reclamation of common materials such as land, seeds, etc., and a change to public policy to support the mission of food sovereignty. The entire internal system of Nyéléni ECA, built and operated by some of the brightest and most passionate activists, provides a robust support system for farmers in terms of numbers and protection of resources. These members remain interconnected and in arms against the encroaching actions of large agricultural entities that are searching for a way to enter local agricultural food markets.

Another program featured on ECVC’s platform is “Hands on the Land for Food Sovereignty”, a program that ECVC has partnered with to focus on “the use and governance of land, water and other natural resources and its effects on the realization of the right to food and food sovereignty.”¹²² While the actual ECVC website has little to promote regarding the initiative, the Hands on the Land main website discusses their sixteen partners from the global north and south and their vision for protecting the world’s most important resources. Their

¹²¹ Nyéléni Europe 2011: European Forum for Food Sovereignty (Krems, Austria, n.d.).

¹²² European Coordination Via Campesina, “Hands on the Land,” European Coordination Via Campesina (European Coordination Via Campesina), accessed December 27, 2021, <https://www.eurovia.org/hands-on-the-land/>.

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partners include ECVC, EHNE Bizkaia, Crocevia, Forschungs- und Dokumentationszentrum Chile-Lateinamerika (FDCL), FIAN International and European sections, and others who devote their mission to the education of food sovereignty, nutrition, and issues of development and cooperation.

The Hands on the Land initiative writes that land, water, seeds, and other natural resources are fundamental human rights and are meant to be revered in a community setting. The culprits jeopardizing this right are powerful entities who take land from small-scale farmers “in the name of ‘development’, ‘food security’, ‘environmental protection’, or the production of ‘clean energy’”¹²³ Hands on the Land argues that natural resources should not be exploited for economic gain but instead utilized as a right that is distributed democratically throughout the community. Action towards this entails changing EU policies to make “decentralized, autonomous, local [,] and sustainable food systems”¹²⁴ Hands on the Land’s work centers on advocacy for small farmers to have access to the Earth’s resources, while also including climate advocacy and bioeconomy in the conversation. By doing this, they link the commodification of natural resources that dominates “the clean energy” market, marking that this impact is an integral part of the issue.¹²⁵

VACDIVA, established in 2019 and set to operate for 4 years, is a unique program that involves the African Swine Fever (ASF), a disease that affects the swine population of Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.¹²⁶ A vaccine for the disease is not available but is being currently

¹²³ “Take Action for Food Sovereignty,” Our Vision | Hands on the Land (Hands on the Land for Food Sovereignty), accessed December 27, 2021, <https://handsontheland.net/about/our-vision/>.

¹²⁴ “Take Action for Food Sovereignty,” Our Vision | Hands on the Land (Hands on the Land for Food Sovereignty), accessed December 27, 2021, <https://handsontheland.net/about/our-vision/>.

¹²⁵ “Take Action for Food Sovereignty,” Bioeconomy | Hands on the Land (Hands on the Land for Food Sovereignty), accessed December 27, 2021, <https://handsontheland.net/issues/bioeconomy/>.

¹²⁶ “Projects & Results | Cordis | European Commission,” European Commission: CORDIS (European Commission), accessed December 27, 2021, <https://cordis.europa.eu/projects>.

worked on through the VACDIVA project. This project is run by the European Union and several national laboratories and funded through the European Union Horizon 2020 program.¹²⁷ ECVC has joined to support the initiative of the program which consists of, creating an effective vaccine, distributing DIVA tests to assess the validity of the vaccines, and continuing to practice spread prevention techniques. They will also work with “communication and dissemination of results and... will [organize] two workshops to communicate the results of the project to both the livestock sector and the hunting community”¹²⁸ The program functions as a partnership, where organizations work together, such as ECVC and Committee on Agriculture (COAG), to run forums on the issue in European nations. These forums discuss current executions of preventative health measures and the future of disease prevention. Each forum is open to the public, welcoming anyone who has expertise in ASF and can contribute to its eradication. ECVC has also committed to publishing newsletters on its website that update the ECVC community on VACDIVA’s current efforts and results.¹²⁹

It is well-established that various diseases have impacted rural community populations more than urban areas. A study conducted in Mexico found that various diseases, when prevalent in rural farming communities impact populations with increased ferocity, therefore impacting land ownership by local community members.¹³⁰ When a population is impacted and the population diminishes, land concentration by foreign investors and an overall loss of land control are more likely. The effort made by VACDIVA, serving as a preventative measure, allows for

¹²⁷ European Coordination Via Campesina, “The Vacdiva Project,” European Coordination Via Campesina (European Coordination Via Campesina), accessed December 27, 2021, <https://www.eurovia.org/campaign/the-vacdiva-project/>.

¹²⁸ European Coordination Via Campesina, “The Vacdiva Project,” Accessed December 27, 2021.

¹²⁹ European Coordination Via Campesina, “The Vacdiva Project,” Accessed December 27, 2021.

¹³⁰ Emily A. Sellars and Jennifer Alix-Garcia, “Labor Scarcity, Land Tenure, and Historical Legacy: Evidence from Mexico,” *Journal of Development Economics* 135 (2018): pp. 504-516, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2018.07.014>.

increased protection of rural populations and for communities to remain educated in disease prevention. This then allows them to do what they do best: feed themselves and their communities.

ECVC, as an extension of LVC, focuses on a campaign against CAP and discusses the policy's impacts on small-scale farmers. They stand by the understanding that LVC holds against neoliberalism, and how it specifically impacts the economic and subsistence systems that small farming communities rely upon.¹³¹ Nyéléni ECA wrote on capitalism as a structure that policies are trying to protect to benefit private entities such as investment firms, private banks, and international corporations.¹³² These beneficiaries are then able to use their financial power and government backing to take over land and set prices that small farmers cannot compete with.

While many of the programs that ECVC works with are also funded by the EU or partnered with the European Commission, their criticism of EU policies does not go unnoticed. One of the fundamental missions of ECVC is to advocate for small farmers in policy reform and to engage them in work within CAP, potentially changing it to benefit rural communities. One of the main arguments against CAP is its interaction with land tenure and funding to support farming operations. ECVC wants to change this dynamic, making the relationship between peasantry rights and EU policy mutually beneficial. They believe that through this reform, a cooperative relationship is created with the EU and the other stakeholders within that policy, benefiting more individuals.¹³³ ECVC also advocates for the end of “the knowledge gap in society about the CAP itself and more specifically about small-scale farming and its contribution

¹³¹ “Food Sovereignty: Via Campesina,” Via Campesina English (La Via Campesina: International Peasants' Movement, January 15, 2003), <https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty/>.

¹³² Nyéléni Europe 2011: European Forum for Food Sovereignty (Krems, Austria, n.d.).

¹³³ European Coordination Via Campesina, “The Cap and Small-Scale Farmers,” The CAP and small-scale farmers (European Coordination Via Campesina), accessed December 27, 2021, <https://www.eurovia.org/campaign/the-cap-and-small-scale-farmers/>.

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to economically sound development in rural areas and to an [environmentally] friendly and climate-neutral way of living.”¹³⁴ To go further in their advocacy, the branch has established a new framework for the rules of CAP, written in their declaration “Small farmers, big solutions: how the CAP can help family farmers”.¹³⁵ ECVC’s framework suggests ways that CAP can help small farmers through growth, cooperation, and reform instead of disenfranchising them for economic benefit.¹³⁶ ECVC has established a series of articles that discuss the different steps of reform while continuing to criticize the current state of CAP for its inequalities.

ECVC and LVC’s work to further the Food Sovereignty Movement

LVC and ECVC operate in unison and separately when dealing with resistance encouragement and community activism. Both groups currently run online platforms where their advocacy can be seen through articles and reports they write and publish online. Their platform remains consistently updated, and they occasionally modify their campaigns to match what is needed to support the food sovereignty of each nation.¹³⁷ Both groups are well known for in-person demonstrations through protests and summit attendance, such as their active involvement with various events hosted by global organizations, including the UN’s “United Nations Food Systems Summit” (UNFSS).¹³⁸ These summits occur annually and focus on giving a voice to small agricultural actors with the aid of LVC.

Global policy officials, such as the members of the UN, that have seen a need to advocate for agrarian reform in small farming communities have responded by creating or contributing to

¹³⁴ European Coordination Via Campesina, “The Cap and Small-Scale Farmers,” Accessed December 27, 2021.

¹³⁵ European Coordination Via Campesina, “The Cap and Small-Scale Farmers,” Accessed December 27, 2021

¹³⁶ European Coordination Via Campesina, “The Cap and Small-Scale Farmers,” Accessed December 27, 2021.

¹³⁷ Due to the severe amplification that LVC uses to get their movement’s intentions on the mainstage for food sovereignty advocacy, research that remains objective on the impact of their activity with large-scale policy makers and

¹³⁸ La Via Campesina. *A Summit Under Siege! Position Paper on UN Food Systems Summit 2021*. La Via Campesina, December 2020, p. 2.

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various launches of transnational agrarian movements (TAMs). TAM structures have included new committee establishment, conference planning, and execution to bring agrarian international movements into the conversation, and partnerships to increase sustainable development. The UN's annual summit events discuss TAMs and their progress with sustainable development, inviting agrarian activist groups to speak from their experiences.

LVC participation during each annual UNFSS before the prevalence of COVID-19 was centered on the voices of various agrarian actors, including small and mid-sized farmers from all over the world, regardless of identity. However, LVC has begun to voice disdain over the influential planners of UNFSS 2021. This reaction is because of the shift from community voices to a more non-inclusive, corporate-focused perspective. In the past, the FAO and UN member governments proposed mandates in the summit, therefore accommodating civil society in summit operations details. However, the decisions for the 2021 UNFSS were made by the UN General Secretary, accompanied by suggestions from the World Economic Forum (WEF), "which is a private sector organization" that represents global corporate interests.

WEF participation in the UN began in 2019 when both groups signed a partnership agreement, which they believed would propel a positive impact in areas dealing with climate change, gender inequality, lack of female empowerment, health, etc.¹³⁹ This private partnership has a 2030 agenda that focuses on "mobiliz[ing] systems and accelerat[ing] finance flows toward the 2030 Agenda and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, taking forward solutions to increase long-term [(Sustainable Development Goals)] SDG investments."¹⁴⁰ LVC has been

¹³⁹ "World Economic Forum and UN Sign Strategic Partnership Framework," World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, June 13, 2019), <https://www.weforum.org/press/2019/06/world-economic-forum-and-un-sign-strategic-partnership-framework/>.

¹⁴⁰ "World Economic Forum and UN Sign Strategic Partnership Framework," World Economic Forum, Accessed March 11, 2022.

quick to condemn the union of the UN and WEF due to their stance on International Financial Institutions (IFI's), which LVC believes does not support the small farmers and peasantry due to their focus on neoliberal ideologies.¹⁴¹ Saturnino M. Borras Jr., in-text an about LVC's fundamental stance against IFI's, states that LVC "does not engage in dialogue or consultative processes with these institutions (although it does engage with some UN agencies)."¹⁴² Therefore, when announcing their criticism about the WEF's participation in the UNFSS 2021, they argued that it has "provided transnational corporations preferential and deferential access to the UN System... [and] raises serious concerns about the integrity of the United Nations as a multilateral system and its independence and impartiality, particularly concerning the protection and promotion of human rights."¹⁴³

When not participating in conferences, LVC and ECVC remain busy with policy reform. One of LVC's major contributions to policy through publication is the UNDROP, which they continue to update as issues surrounding food sovereignty evolve. Their most recent UNDROP webinar, partnered with Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN), worked to develop The New Rights of Peasants Declaration: A Landmark for the Right to Food Struggle and Climate Justice. These declarations have placed an obligation on member states of the UN to contribute to food sovereignty efforts and given the peasantry a legitimate place in international policy agreements.¹⁴⁴

ECVC, as an active branch of LVC, has been quick to side with LVC on the outcome of UNFSS 2021, explicitly writing a public letter addressing the Ministers of Agriculture, Council

¹⁴¹ Saturnino M. Borras, "The Politics of Transnational Agrarian Movements," *Development and Change* 41, no. 5 (2010): pp. 771-803, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01661.x>. Accessed March 10, 2022.

¹⁴² Saturnino M. Borras, "The Politics of Transnational Agrarian Movements," Accessed March 10, 2022.

¹⁴³ La Via Campesina. *A Summit Under Siege! Position Paper on UN Food Systems Summit 2021*. La Via Campesina, December 2020, p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ La Via Campesina "Replug: Peasants Rights Explained: An Illustrated Version of the UN Declaration (UNDROP)!: Via Campesina," Accessed 17 March 2022.

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Coordination Working Party on FAO Matters (AGRIFAO), Chair Jose Luis Coelho Silva, and the representatives of the member states of the UN.¹⁴⁵ AGRIFAO is a group assembled by the EU that works closely with the FAO, OECD, UNECE, and Codex Alimentarius to handle EU positions surrounding “food and nutrition, agriculture, fisheries and forestry” and policies surrounding “FAO's mandate and activities - including the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).”¹⁴⁶ In this letter, ECVC completely delegitimizes UNFSS 2021, saying that “we must recall that this summit is not legitimate as a ‘UN Summit’ since it is not convened by the [m]ember [s]tates nor validated by the UN General Assembly” and that “[t]he [organization] of the ‘summit’ and its process are also in flagrant contradiction of the priorities of EU policies such as the Green Deal and Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, as well as of the recommendations of the European Parliament.”¹⁴⁷ As strong supporters of legitimate progress in the food sovereignty movement that includes the participation of the peasantry, ECVC has remained vocal against the transition of power involving the UNFSS 2021.

ECVC has also made individual efforts with international policy in Europe. For example, ECVC has recently succeeded in incorporating seed rights into European law, making seed rights “legally recognized in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Agriculture and Food (ITPGRFA).”¹⁴⁸ This move has been seen as a significant step forward in the protection of

¹⁴⁵ Coordinating Committee of European Coordination Via Campesina, “European Coordination Via Campesina,” European Coordination Via Campesina, April 21, 2021, https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021-04-22-ECVC-Letter-to-EU-Council-on-UNFSS_Final.pdf.

¹⁴⁶ “Working Party on International Food and Agricultural Questions,” Consilium (Council of the EU and the European Council, January 18, 2022), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/preparatory-bodies/working-party-on-international-food-and-agricultural-questions/>.

¹⁴⁷ Coordinating Committee of European Coordination Via Campesina, “European Coordination Via Campesina,” European Coordination Via Campesina, April 21, 2021, https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021-04-22-ECVC-Letter-to-EU-Council-on-UNFSS_Final.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ European Coordination Via Campesina, “Webinar: Incorporating Peasants' Rights to Seeds in European Law,” European Coordination Via Campesina, October 20, 2021, <https://www.eurovia.org/event/webinar-incorporating-peasants-rights-to-seeds-in-european-law/>.

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agroecological processes in Europe. ECVC has upheld supervision of these rights by holding events that evaluate the execution of seed rights and their real contribution to food sovereignty in terms of agroecology. These events have also been held to “express ECVC’s demands for a coherent European regulatory framework implementing peasants’ rights relative to seeds, including concrete proposals for the establishment of a separate regulatory framework for peasants’ seed systems.”¹⁴⁹ Even after policy success, ECVC continues to advocate for food sovereignty rights in the rural communities they represent.

Despite LVC’s heavy communication with transnational organizations, they have made it clear that their work does not stop at the end of meetings and conferences. Delphine Thivet, in their essay, “Peasant’s Transnational Mobilization for Food Sovereignty in La Via Campesina”, documents LVC’s statement on their goals for mobilization. When asked about aspirations, LVC clearly stated that their work was “[f]ar from focusing only on small-scale farmers and rural workers’ rights against transnational corporations and the WTO” and that their “objective is always [focused on] social change. [LVC] really [defines themselves] as a movement that wants to transform society.”¹⁵⁰ A signature move that LVC utilizes is public protesting, considering it as a viable method for community outreach and peasantry empowerment, encouraging rural workers to use their voice. This form of mass communication is considered to be one of the many mobilization tactics LVC prefers, aligning with their understanding that mobilization is one of the most effective ways to make a change. When writing on LVC’s mobilization processes, Borras Jr. states that “[LVC] recognizes that: ‘to create a significant impact, we

¹⁴⁹ European Coordination Via Campesina, “Webinar: Incorporating Peasants’ Rights to Seeds in European Law,” Accessed March 8, 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Carole Counihan, Valeria Siniscalchi, and Delphine Thivet, “Peasant’s Transnational Mobilization for Food Sovereignty in La Via Campesina,” in *Food Activism: Agency, Democracy and Economy* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 201.

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should... carry out our coordinated actions and mobilizations at the global level... Mobilization is still our principal strategy.”¹⁵¹

LVC has had an established influence in global power systems due to it being the supervisory entity of their regional branches, such as ECVC. The influence LVC holds has impacted leading global organizations, such as the UN and FAO, and their partner organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Their interest has been captured by LVC’s intentions of placing themselves in the middle of international organizations’ conversations on food sovereignty, utilizing global food emergencies to show officials that their advocacy work matters to the future of agriculture.¹⁵² LVC argued that the 2008 food crisis “made UN bodies and member states recognize the importance of including the voices of rural social movements and civil society in shaping food policies” and begin a new wave of new advocacy committees such as the “Committee on World Food Security and its Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM).”¹⁵³ These groups now see LVC as a staple resource for understanding rural agricultural actors.

During these committees’ meetings on agrarian reform, LVC organization representatives are not the only actors speaking up. Many community members who belong to the global peasantry remain vocal not only on the impacts of committee decisions but on how the peasantry is understood and respected in communication.¹⁵⁴ Ingeborg Gaarde wrote on the passion of peasants regarding government officials’ understandings of their identity. Gaarde’s work stated

¹⁵¹ Saturnino M. Borras, “The Politics of Transnational Agrarian Movements,” Accessed March 10, 2022.

¹⁵² La Via Campesina. *A Summit Under Siege! Position Paper on UN Food Systems Summit 2021*. La Via Campesina, December 2020, p. 1.

¹⁵³ La Via Campesina. *A Summit Under Siege! Position Paper on UN Food Systems Summit 2021*, December 2020, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Ingeborg Gaarde, *Peasants Negotiating a Global Policy Space: La Vía Campesina in the Committee on World Food Security* (London: Routledge, 2019).

that “the term ‘multi-stakeholder platform remains largely contested by social movements and other civil society actors...[because] from the viewpoint of many peasant activists, the CFS term ‘stakeholder’ alludes to the idea that all stakeholders have the same weight and thus dilutes power imbalances and different mandates.”¹⁵⁵ LVC’s commitment to a more centralized, humanitarian understanding surrounding the peasantry as a societal actor, not an economic investor, shows that LVC fights for an evolved understanding of the peasantry as a community and demands that others view the peasantry in the same light.

When trying to understand the peasantry community, NGOs and governmental farming organizations have traditionally been viewed as the experts on the peasantry community’s voice. LVC is challenging this idea by setting the stage to make talking directly to government officials accessible to peasantry members. Borras Jr. wrote on LVC’s reasoning for empowering small farmers to bypass their supervising organizations, saying that “[t]here are simply too many NGOs in Central America acting on behalf of the peasants. ... Besides, too much money is being wasted on setting up all these organi[z]ations and paying salaries...[w]e farmers can speak up for ourselves.”¹⁵⁶ LVC sees the importance of a more direct conversation about peasant struggles and the enemies that produce them, making a public slogan of “not about us without us” an active practice.¹⁵⁷ This participation component allows for small farmers who see land debilitate before their eyes to give more accurate accounts for their local communities and potentially change the minds of international officials.

Conclusion

¹⁵⁵ Ingeborg Gaarde, Peasants Negotiating a Global Policy Space: La Vía Campesina in the Committee on World Food Security.

¹⁵⁶ Saturnino M. Borras, “The Politics of Transnational Agrarian Movements,” *Development and Change*,” Accessed 10 March 2022.

¹⁵⁷ Saturnino M. Borras, “The Politics of Transnational Agrarian Movements,” *Development and Change*,” Accessed 10 March 2022.

LVC and its European extension, ECVC, have made a mark on the food sovereignty movement by building an impressive internal structure that is run by passionate food activists who work to cover all areas of food rights issues and incite action within the community of small and medium farmers in developing and developed nations. This structure aids in supporting their strong campaigns that embody the major components of food sovereignty, bringing peasants together through amplifying their common struggles. LVC goes further than their in-person ventures and virtual platforms by confronting some of the largest international policy institutions about their ways of avoiding the actual enemy to agrarian reform and peasantry rights: entities and individuals who strive only for economic excellence and use financials as a measure of success. These powerful government officials, foreign investors, and large-scale agribusiness entities only see land as the first step to additional money in their pockets, when small farmers conceptualize it as not only a mechanism to earn a living wage, but also a resource that deserves and requires preservation and proper cultivation to ensure a safe and healthy future. LVC is passionate about preserving land as a resource for future agricultural use and educating groups and individuals about the importance of land in relation to food sovereignty.

Land is essential to food sovereignty rights in agriculture in that it is a necessary factor in crop growth but is dangerously popular as a commodity and is subsequently taken from the hands of local eastern and central European farmers daily, without much resistance from government regulation. Land grabbing appears to be a signature move for large corporations, especially during moments of government decentralization, reform, or instability where land occupation is not the main concern for officials or where regulations are easily overridden.

Despite all of this, however, LVC and ECVC members have diligently worked to build dialogue around these issues, specifically bringing to light the mass land consolidations and the

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loss of small farming communities and judge how influential policymakers are portraying all parties. While LVC and ECVC's overall work is directed toward general food rights, all advocacy goals each group completes contribute to land ownership, one of the necessary resources for food sovereignty today. Additionally, both organizations have fought to completely change the way that the peasantry is viewed and who their spokespeople are. LVC does not view its designated researchers as experts on issues but engages in conversation with peasantry members so their voices are heard as well. LVC and ECVC's work is far from over, but they have proved their continuing efforts are being noticed by large government entities and signifies that both groups made a significant impact against land grabbing and, therefore, furthering the food sovereignty movement.

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