

Title: Declaration for Healthy Food and Agriculture

Many of us working in sustainable agriculture operate on the basic premise that a healthy food system is necessary to meet the urgent challenges immediately ahead. Over the past 5 or 6 decades we have built up a highly productive industrial food system, but highly subsidized by cheap fossil fuels, abundant land and water resources, and the maximization of cheap calories. But now we face rising energy and food costs, a changing climate, declining water supplies, a growing population, and the paradox of widespread hunger and obesity.

A radically different approach is needed for growing food and developing the agriculture of the future. We must build food systems that are organized on a foundation of health: for our communities, for people, for animals, and for the natural environment. The quality of food, and not just its quantity, ought to guide our agriculture. The ways we grow, distribute, and prepare food should celebrate our cultural diversity and our shared humanity, providing not only sustenance, but justice, beauty, and security.

Food policy has a duty to protect people from malnutrition, unsafe food, and exploitation, and to protect the land and water on which we depend from degradation. Everyone from growers to eaters has a duty to create regional systems that can provide healthy food for their communities. We all have the duty to honor and respect the workers of the land without whom we could not survive. For the Journal of Sustainable Agriculture, many of the changes needed have begun, but we must now accelerate the transformation of all sectors of our food system and make its benefits available to all.

At the national Slow Food Nation event last July in San Francisco, an important group of sustainable food system advocates proposed the following 12 principles to frame the food and agriculture policy needed to move all agriculture towards sustainability. A healthy food and agriculture policy:

1. forms the foundation of secure and prosperous societies, healthy communities, and healthy people.
2. provides access to affordable, nutritious food to everyone.
3. prevents the exploitation of farmers, workers, and natural resources; the domination of genomes and markets; and the cruel treatment of animals, by any nation, corporation, or individual.
4. upholds the dignity, safety, and quality of life for all who work to feed us.
5. commits resources to teach children the skills and knowledge essential to food production, preparation, nutrition, and enjoyment.
6. protects the finite resources of productive soils, fresh water, and biological diversity.
7. strives to remove fossil fuel from every link of the food chain and replace it with renewable resources and energy.
8. originates from a biological rather than an industrial framework.
9. fosters diversity in all its relevant forms: diversity of domestic and wild species; diversity of foods, flavors, and traditions; diversity of ownership.
10. requires a national dialog concerning technologies used in production, and allows regions to adopt their own respective guidelines on such matters.
11. enforces transparency so that citizens know how their food is produced, where it comes from, and what it contains.

12. promotes economic structures and support programs to nurture the development of just and sustainable regional farms and food networks.

All of us committed to a future with healthy and sustainable food and agriculture can join in supporting these principles (see FOODDECLARATION.ORG). A goal of this journal is to provide ideas, examples, and energy for seeing them applied.

Stephen Gliessman

Editor, JSA

(Editors note: Most of this editorial was extracted directly from the original Declaration document read on the steps of City Hall, San Francisco, on August 28, 2008, and I am grateful to the team of framers and drafters for their excellent efforts on behalf of healthy food and agriculture).