

UK Agroecology Alliance

Vision

- Agroecology to be the new norm in food and farming/agriculture.

Goals/objectives:

- Changing discourse: changing the framing of food and farming/agriculture amongst politicians, NGOs, public, food providers and researchers.
- Shifting the political agenda towards agroecology, particularly R&D funding.

How the Alliance will work

- Building the movement through networks and alliances.
- Engaging with all parts of the decision making process and food web where appropriate.
- Education and information.
- Helping farmers and small scale food producers to get their views heard.
- Developing policies and strategies to deliver our vision.

Graphically:



Audience:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public.• Governments.• Politicians at all levels especially the APPG on Agroecology.• Researchers and institutions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economists.• Social movements.• Small-scale food providers.• International Inter Governmental Organisations – FAO, CBD, Rio+20 |
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Scope

The Alliance would work and co-operate throughout the UK but recognise the importance of close liaison and collaboration with similar movements throughout the world particularly at times when important international issues are being debated and decisions made which impact throughout the planet.

Alliance Strategy:

Emphasis on: food sovereignty; multifunctionality; reconnecting actors/system; consumers; use of examples.

Through: mapping activities, resources, materials; existing networks and new allies; widening our group; operating as a (web based, self-organising) hub; a big event and themes in existing events; seeking pressure points; developing a media strategy; campaigning and, overall, being [P]olitical.

Actions and approaches:

1. Clearly stating the case by producing concise document(s) focusing on science, environment and economics and using compelling stories as illustrations.
2. Backing up the case by collating evidence and making it accessible (often using the work of supporting organisations).
3. Producing myth busting documents that support the case for agroecology and demonstrate the weaknesses of the current system.
4. Promoting new approaches, for example permaculture.
5. Using multimedia to ensure that all generations feel part of the movement and can engage and get access to information and campaigning ideas.
6. Running campaigns to achieve specific policy or legislative changes.
7. Engaging strategically with organisations outside the Alliance to influence their thinking and policies.
8. Maintaining a flow of information to the media.

UK Agroecology Alliance

The UK Agroecology Alliance is a new grouping of like minded UK based organisations seeking to make agroecology the norm for production and to address the UK dependency on imports of basics such as animal feed.

Agroecology

Agroecology is defined as the use of ecological concepts and principles to study, design, and manage agricultural systems. The five main principles are: recycling of nutrients, building of soil organic matter; minimising losses from the system; maximising biodiversity and genetic diversity; and enhancing biological interactions.

Agroecology goes beyond a one-dimensional view of agroecosystems - their genetics, agronomy, edaphology, and so on,- to embrace an understanding of ecological and social levels of co-evolution, structure and function.

Miguel Altieri

Beyond the scientific definition Agroecology is also described as a 'practice' and a 'movement': Agroecology practice is based on knowledge of principles and techniques many of which are developed and passed on by farmers following experimentation so that agricultural communities own and refine different techniques to suit local circumstances and markets. In many countries and internationally, Agroecology is also a 'movement' for change in food production towards one that is more environmentally and socially sustainable.

The Objectives of the Alliance are;

1. Changing discourse: changing the framing of the debate on food production among politicians, public, food providers and researchers
2. Shifting the political agenda towards agroecology, in particular in R&D funding priorities.

The intention of the Alliance is to build on the current and past work of supporters in ways that build networks for change in policy on food production. The Alliance supports and works within the framework of food sovereignty, as defined in the Declaration and Synthesis report of Nyéléni 2007: forum for food sovereignty, Mali, in February 2007:

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems... Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition... Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations.”

Our focus will be mainly on UK and EU policy changes but it will be responsive and linked to the reforms that are also desperately needed in external agricultural investments in the rest of the world where the drive for ever expanding unsustainable monocultures are wrecking rural societies and causing massive ecological harm.

Time to Reverse the Trend

The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report of 2008 made it perfectly clear that major changes are needed in how food is produced, traded and controlled if the needs of the human population are to be met without trashing the planet.

Since IAASTD was published the interests of communities, small producers and consumers have continued to be marginalised. Visible attempts to implement the report's findings are hard to find. Indeed the wisdom embodied in the report is in great danger of being eclipsed by the concept of "sustainable intensification": the latest attempt to present out-dated, unfair and highly damaging forms of intensive agriculture in a better light.

"Sustainable intensification" is a very thin veil for production systems which attempt to squeeze yet more from soil and animals. It builds on forms of production that have already gone well beyond a state which could be called 'sustainable', but fit neatly into the globalised, capital intensive model of agriculture. Sustainable intensification is a predominantly top-down approach that ignores the views, aspirations and knowledge of millions. It reduces local control of food supply - from seeds, to the means of production, to science and research priorities, mostly controlled by distant corporations.

An Agroecology Alliance is needed to change the mind-set and priorities of UK decisions makers and shift the paradigm towards production systems that are multifunctional in their nature and put the needs of communities, consumers and the planet before companies and academics who serve their interests.

The restoration of the soil and freshwater and marine ecosystems is vital. These ecosystems need to fulfil their potential to produce food and other renewable resources while safeguarding water supplies and restoring biodiversity in the UK, EU and the rest of the planet.

The UK has many organisations doing incredible work to promote real durable solutions which work for people wherever they live. However, it is all too easy for small NGOs and groups to be marginalised when it come to the big decisions. So there are times when strength in numbers will be essential if the necessary paradigm shift is to be achieved in a time scale that works for communities, producers and consumers and the planet.

On occasions, this will mean agreeing some common objectives and policies. On other occasions it will mean working collectively to press for policy shifts. At other times joint events or reports might be needed. Alliance members could also call on others for support at key moments in campaigns to swell their numbers.

The Alliance would not replace individual organisations but add to their work. It would also be a very useful means to exchange views, providing a common repository for resources and information.

The principle objective would be to make agroecology the main form of management in the UK and in doing so influence thinking in the rest of the world to follow the same path.

Getting Involved

If you like the principle of working collaboratively to achieve the political momentum to make Agroecology the mainstream form of food production and land management in the UK and to re-build rural communities by revitalising land and water based enterprises based on agroecological principles please join us. If you want further information please contact patrickmulvany@clara.co.uk

The Alliance has the support of the following organisations : UK Food Group, Campaign for Real Farming, Permaculture Alliance, the Scottish Crofters Federation, Pesticides Action Network UK, Econexus, GM Freeze, Practical Action, Soil Association, War on Want

NYÉLÉNI 2007: FORUM FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY
DEFINITION OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (FROM THE DECLARATION OF NYÉLÉNI)

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal - fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations.

SIX PRINCIPLES OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY
(FROM SYNTHESIS REPORT)

	Food Sovereignty:	is FOR	is AGAINST
1.	Focuses on Food for People:	Food sovereignty puts the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies;	and <i>rejects</i> the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business
2.	Values Food Providers:	Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food;	and <i>rejects</i> those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.
3.	Localises Food Systems:	Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms;	and <i>rejects</i> governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.
4.	Puts Control Locally:	Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity; it recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities;	and <i>rejects</i> the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.
5.	Builds Knowledge and Skills:	Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organisations that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations;	and <i>rejects</i> technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.
6.	Works with Nature:	Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to “ <i>heal the planet so that the planet may heal us</i> ”;	and <i>rejects</i> methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

These six principles are interlinked and inseparable: in implementing the food sovereignty policy framework all should be applied.