

Actions to Take for Seed Freedom

(From Presbyterian Hunger Program and the US Food Sovereignty Alliance)

I. INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS:

- Travel with us, witness and support struggles from communities working on protecting their seeds in India and El Salvador this year. To see the list of trips available to join, click [here](#)
- See the [map](#) from Via Campesina on the global mobilization on April 17th
- If you have access to space, **grow your own plants and harvest seeds to share and exchange with others.** See Organic Seed Alliance's "[Seed Saving Guide](#)" for more.
- **Join a seed library, seed bank, or seed exchange.** See "Resources" section for information about some of the existing groups.
- **Learn more about seeds and the food system.** Check out the "Resources" section for some ideas of where to start.
- **Eat Good, Slow Food:** Prepare a meal for your family using heirloom varieties and [discuss the nutrient value of wilder species](#) versus their domesticated varieties. For example, Peruvian Purple potatoes have 171 milligrams of phytonutrients compared to the Yukon Gold variety (5.45 mg) or the standard white potato (1.03 mg)!
- **Share the report from the US Food Sovereignty Alliance** with others in your local community and online through social media and website posts. Consider sharing it with your representatives in the House and Senate. (Report will be posted on www.pcusa.org/internationalfarmers.)

II. COMMUNITY ACTIONS:

- **Convene** a community and/or faith group to study local plants, native/indigenous seeds, and issues around seed patenting. Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper about the need to protect seed varieties from privatization.
- **Organize to Defend Seeds:** If you can't find a seed library or community seed bank in your neighborhood, create one! Gather your local farmers and gardeners to build a seed bank in your local library by 'checking-in' your most successful breeds and 'checking-out' the champions among fellow breeders. For inspiration, read about the partnership between [Basalt Public Library and the Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Institute](#) to find out how it can be done, and watch [this webinar](#) from the Center for a New American Dream to learn more.
- **View:** Host a discussion groups and view the film [Seeds of Freedom](#) or the recorded [webinar](#) -- **GMOs: The "Facts" on Health, Environment, Farmer Impact, Control in the U.S. and the World.**
- **Study:** Start a short-term reading group to study [La Vía Campesina's publication: Our Seeds, Our Future](#), or to study the articles on Seeds and Peasant Sovereignty in the 2013 [Right to Food and Nutrition Watch](#), which was released on the 2013 World Food Day.

- **Coordinate learning exchanges:** Come together with other people in your community, or with other communities around the region, nation, or around the world, to share practical lessons on how to do seed saving, how to organize seed libraries, and what strategies to use to fight for seed sovereignty.
- **Declare Your Community a Seed Sovereignty Zone:** Building on models of local declarations passed in Navajo communities, as a result of the efforts of the Black Mesa Water Coalition, bring people together in your community to define what seed sovereignty would look like where you live, and then get your local government to pass a resolution recognizing your local rights. [[see this](#) on food sovereignty ordinances in Maine]
- **Fight for Seed Freedom:** Join a 'Seed Keepers' group. Contact the US Food Sovereignty Alliance's Rights of Mother Earth/Defense of the Commons workgroup at smersha@grassrootsonline.org or call Sara at 617.524.1400.

III. DOMESTIC/NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Enforce anti-trust laws** such as the Sherman Act, and use these in combination with the authority of the USDA (which extends beyond concentration to include unfair and deceptive practices) to ensure open and competitive seed markets.
- **Hold biotech companies, not farmers, responsible** for drift of transgenic material (from GM plants).
- Return to the **Plant Variety Protection Act**, rather than patent law, as the main legal framework to regulate seed ownership.
- Put a **moratorium** on deregulation of all additional genetically engineered seeds (including those currently in the pipeline) until a more effective regulatory framework is in place.
- Instead of investing millions in so-called "climate-smart" biotech seeds, address the root causes of climate change, and **promote climate-resilient agroecology**.
- **Invest in more public-sector, non-patented, conventional seed research** based on existing knowledge, such as that held by Indigenous Peoples, family farmers, and urban gardeners. Ensure that all researchers and practitioners have equal and unrestricted access to genetic material for the purpose of research and development.
- **Provide public support** for the startup of seed collectives, seed banks, small seed companies, and other ways of disseminating and sharing seed in both rural and urban areas.
- **Incentivize quality over quantity:** Instead of subsidizing mass production of just a few commodity crops, support farmers attempting to transition to organic and/or more sustainable practices. Consider (and incentivize) diversified farming operations as a form of on-farm conservation.
- **Learn from the Global South:** Consider the Organization of African Unity's [African Model Legislation for the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers, and Breeders, and for the Regulation of Access to Biological Resources](#), Bhutan's National Organic Policy, El Salvador's nationwide ban of 53 agrochemicals in Sept 2013, and El Salvador's 2008 Constitutional Amendment to add food sovereignty and a commitment

to preserve biodiversity, as starting points for the United States to reform our legislative framework around seeds and farming.

- **Remove patents on life:** Incentivize, don't criminalize, seed-saving and sharing.

IV. INTERNATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Keep seed, agriculture, and food out of the World Trade Organization and trade agreements.** Food and seeds are the foundation for community and state sovereignty. Trade agreements should not include any provisions related to food or agriculture, including policies related to agricultural subsidies or regulation of genetically engineered crops. Each country's food needs and systems are unique, therefore "policy harmonization" of food or agricultural policies must not be sought or incentivized.
- As an extension of removing patents on life, **dismantle the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) structure** and roll back UPOV provisions in countries that have already implemented them.
- Instead, **implement the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture ('The International Seed Treaty')**, which says that "International cooperation and open exchange of genetic resources are essential for food security."
- Implement the **recommendations of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, & Technology for Development (IAASTD)**, as well as those made by former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier DeSchutter, in his **final report**.

RESOURCES

(click on text below to link to online resources)

BACKGROUND & CURRENT SITUATION

- April edition of Presbyterians Today (Specifically on seeds):
- *Our Seeds, Our Future - La Via Campesina* publication bit.ly/1j9W35J
- Promoting Seed Sovereignty <http://bit.ly/1h0BKTe>
- Seed Freedom Video bit.ly/1fofuTv , Declaration bit.ly/1dyjsOG & Facebook page on.fb.me/1pAcOap
- Seed Industry Structure Info-Graphic bit.ly/1dyjHcy
- Organic Food and Industry Infographic bit.ly/1heIASl
- Overlap of USDA and Monsanto bit.ly/1mwV6Y8
- International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, & Technology for Development bit.ly/OYrd59
- International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture bit.ly/O085SZ
- Seeds for Life: Scaling up Agro-Biodiversity bit.ly/1pcTPEi
- Putting the Cartel Before the Horse bit.ly/1o4MrOp
- Transcripts from joint USDA / DOJ hearing on concentration in food and agriculture, Ankeny, IA. 1.usa.gov/1pAcXuo

SEED FINDING

- **Seed Finder:** Online guide for finding non-patented and organic seeds: www.organicseedfinder.org
- **Some seed companies** that focus on organic, open-pollinated, heirloom and traditional varieties:
 - Fedco www.fedcoseeds.com
 - Adaptive Seeds www.adaptiveseeds.com
 - Native Seed Search www.nativeseeds.org
 - Sierra Seeds Cooperative www.sierraseeds.org
 - Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds www.rareseeds.com
 - Kitazawa Seeds – esp. Asian heirloom varieties www.kitazawaseed.com

SEED SAVING/KEEPING & SEED LIBRARIES

- ORGANIC SEED ALLIANCE www.seedalliance.org
 - Participatory Plant Breeding Toolkit bit.ly/1rGep2f
 - A Seed Saving Guide for Gardeners and Farmers bit.ly/1rGep2f
 - Organic Seed Resource Guide bit.ly/QkfQFt
 - Organic Seed Production Tutorials bit.ly/1mwVUfz
- Seed Saving Resources from Seed Savers Exchange bit.ly/1gGnBQF
- How To Save A Public Library: Make It A Seed Bank n.pr/1dwn7fo

- **How to Start a Community Seed Project** bit.ly/1heL0aC
- **Seed Saving Powerpoint Presentations and PDFs:** www.slideshare.net/PX8
- **International Seed Saving Institute:** www.seedsave.org/issi/issi.html
- **Dropbox to a Seed Library School Organizing Kit** (a veritable treasure trove!): bit.ly/117PXTw
- **The Seed Library Social Network** seedlibraries.org

SEED GROUPS & RESOURCES

Native Food Resources:

- Occidental Arts and Ecology Center: www.oaec.org
- Native Harvest/White Earth Land Recovery Project: www.nativeharvest.com
- Native Seeds/SEARCH: www.nativeseeds.org
- TCEDC Taos Food Center: www.tcedc.org/TFC.html
- Tohono O’odham Community Action: www.tocaonline.org
- New Mexico Acequias Association: www.lasacequias.org
- Seed Sovereignty Alliance: www.lasacequias.org/programs/seed-alliance
- Food and Seed Sovereignty Conferences: www.foodandseedconference.info
- Traditional Native American Farmers Association: www.tnafa.org/TNAFA.html
- Grassroots Group out of the Northwest: <http://seedambassadors.org/>
- Organic Seed Alliance – Regions:
 - seedalliance.org/southeast
 - seedalliance.org/california
 - seedalliance.org/pacific_northwest

Seed Quotes

“The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.” — *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: **seed**-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with **seed** in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. [Genesis 1:10-12](#)

“Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.” — *Martin Luther*

“Every problem has in it the seeds of its own solution. If you don't have any problems, you don't get any seeds.” — *Norman Vincent Peale*

“Seeds have the power to preserve species, to enhance cultural as well as genetic diversity, to counter economic monopoly and to check the advance of conformity on all its many fronts.” — *Michael Pollan*

“We need to decentralise our food system, and if we need to decentralise our food system, decentralise seed provisioning. Seed sovereignty must become very central to food sovereignty.” – Vandana Shiva

“Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.”
— Robert Louis Stevenson

“All the magic of creation exists within a single tiny seed.” – The Wise Old Sprite of the Forest, from the animated film *Fern Gully: The Last Rainforest*.

KEYWORDS/GLOSSARY

Agroecology is a set of practices that are **socially just** because they are based on local knowledge of those who work the land and the leadership of women and young people; **environmentally friendly** because they are based on local materials, protection of biodiversity and the rights of Mother Earth; and **economically sustainable** because they are based on local communities' basic needs for healthy food, support to local economies, and democratic distribution of resources.

Biotechnology is the use of living systems and organisms to develop or make useful products, or "any technological application that uses biological systems, living organisms or derivatives thereof, to make or modify products or processes for specific use" (UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Art. 2)

Commodification is the process of treating something that cannot be owned or that everyone has a right to like a product that can be bought and sold.

Commodity Crops:

Commons refers to all natural resources, information, and any product derived from collective wisdom, work, and traditional knowledge. Commons are held as a collective wealth to be shared and maintained.

Cultural heritage refers to artifacts, seeds, traditions and ways of living that are passed from generation to generation. In the text, we also use “agricultural heritage” which is a similar term, but is directed to the act of agriculture, the production of food for sustenance.

Deregulation: In this context, deregulation is the process whereby the government enables a new genetically modified product to enter the market for sale and use. Also called “approval”.

Food Sovereignty (*From the Declaration of the International Forum on Food Sovereignty, held in Mali in 2007 – also known as the Nyéléni Declaration*): “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.”

Free Trade Agreements Treaty (such as FTAA or NAFTA) between two or more **countries** to establish a free trade area where commerce in goods and services can be conducted across their common borders, without tariffs or hindrances but (in contrast to a common market) capital or labor may not move freely. Member countries usually impose a uniform tariff (called common external tariff) on trade with non-member countries.

GMOs: Refers to Genetically Modified Organisms. Genetically modified (or genetically engineered) plants, animals, and seeds have had their DNA altered in a laboratory, forcibly adding genes from other plants, animals, viruses or bacteria. This is a relatively new kind of biotechnology, and is very different from what has happened naturally over millennia (even if we consider human interaction and influence on natural evolutionary processes).

Heirloom varieties: Crop seeds that are preserved and passed down by different generations of a family or community to succeeding generations.

IAASTD: Sponsored by the World Bank and the United Nations, the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development (IAASTD) is the most comprehensive global assessment of agriculture to date. Authored by 400 scientists and development experts from over 80 countries, it highlights the urgent need to undertake major shifts in governance, trade, finance and development policies in order to “feed the world.”

International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: Commonly referred to as ‘The International Seed Treaty’, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture calls for farmers, plant breeders and scientists to have universal access to plant genetic materials, thus challenging monopolistic control of global seed systems.

Rights of Mother Earth: A recognition that all beings, forests, water, and the earth itself has rights. The concept was elaborated into the **Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth** at an international gathering in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2010. The term Rights of Nature is also used to describe this concept.

Seed Keeping is seed saving which emphasizes the cultural traditions associated with the seed and plant, which may include agronomic as well as social practices (i.e. familial, ritual, communal and identity).

Seed Saving is the practice of saving seeds or other reproductive material (e.g. tubers) from vegetables, grain, herbs, and flowers for use from year to year for annuals and nuts, tree fruits,

and berries for perennials and trees. This is the traditional way farms and gardens were maintained.

Sherman Act: The Sherman Act of 1890 is a federal statute that prohibits anticompetitive business practices and requires the government to investigate and pursue trusts.

Terminator seeds are seeds that produce sterile plants, used in some genetically modified crops so that a new supply of seeds has to be bought every year.

UPOV [Convention]: The International Convention on the Protection of New Varieties of Plants codifies, institutionalizes, and internationalizes the privatization of seed systems by establishing patent rights over seed genetic material. First adopted in 1961 (latest revision in 1991, hence also often referred to as UPOV '91), it also established an organization known as the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.