

Towards a work programme for the UK Food Group's 'Sustainable Agriculture' activity

"Farmer-centred agroecology and localised food systems"

May 2000

At the recent UK Food Group planning meeting it was decided to divide the UKFG's future activities into three, covering: Trade, TNCs and Sustainable Agriculture. The latter activity would cover: the existing work of the UKabc (lobby on Agricultural Biodiversity including FAO/CGRFA/IU and CBD/COP; Biosafety and GE; support to Southern Seed Security, through PELUM; Information sharing via UKabc website) within the framework of Sustainable Agriculture - or at least, the sustainable, ecological alternative to industrial agriculture that promotes local food systems.

Since the development of the concept of sustainable agriculture in the 1980s, there have been many improvements in understanding of the way in which 'sustainability' can be achieved. In parallel to the process of negotiating Agenda 21 (and its chapter 14 on Sustainable Agriculture), UNCED also agreed the formation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which would have special links with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) on matters concerning food and agriculture - food security, GRFA, Agricultural Biodiversity. The jointly agreed objectives are the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity and the equitable sharing of benefits from its use.

There is now a refocusing of the 7 principles of Sustainable Agriculture in harmony with the Ecosystem Approach concept, developed within the CBD. The major principle is now considered that of sustaining agroecosystem functions to produce food and other agricultural products, through the sustainable utilisation of agricultural biodiversity.

The understanding of agricultural biodiversity has widened in concept:

"Agricultural biodiversity encompasses the variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms which are necessary to sustain key functions of the agro-ecosystem, its structure and processes for, and in support of, food production and food security".

This leads to defining three dimensions or functions of agricultural biodiversity:

- ◆ **Sustainable production** of food and other agricultural products emphasizing both strengthening sustainability in production systems at all levels of intensity and improving the conservation, sustainable use and enhancement of the diversity of all genetic resources for food and agriculture, especially plant and animal genetic resources, in all types of production systems.
- ◆ **Biological or life support** to production emphasizing conservation, sustainable use and enhancement of the biological resources that support sustainable production systems, particularly soil biota, pollinators and predators.
- ◆ **Ecological and social services** provided by agro-ecosystems such as landscape and wildlife protection, soil protection and health (fertility, structure and function), water cycle and water quality, air quality, CO₂ sequestration, etc.

(FAO 1999)

A move to support such an approach highlights the incompatibility with industrial production systems

<i>Farmer-centred Agroecology & Localised Food Systems</i>	<i>Industrial Agriculture & Globalised Food Systems</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ecological farming ● Local Markets ● Polyculture ● Diverse locally improved varieties and breeds ● Biosafety ● Farmers' Rights ● Farmer First ● FAO/CBD <p>Sustains the integrity of agroecosystems and sustains local food production in the long-term</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Green/Gene Revolution ● Commoditised Global Food Trade ● Monoculture ● GE + uniform next generation GM seeds ● Biopiracy ● Patents and PVP ● Shareholder first ● WTO/WIPO/UPOV <p>Maximises the extraction of globalised commodities from the natural resource base for as long as possible</p>

Challenges

The main challenge is therefore how to shift policy and practice in favour of production systems that sustain productive agroecosystem as well as the local food and livelihood security of poor communities.

This requires ownership and control of resources (land, water, genetic) in the hands of communities or their elected representatives. This will require changes in policies and priorities including, for example (and in no particular order):

- Recognising and promoting appropriate production methods that sustain the agroecosystem - managing temporally, spatially and agronomically complex systems that nurture multi-species and multi-varieties and value total production;
- Supporting food self-reliance, prioritising localised production and consumption
- Full implementation of Farmers' Rights; Equitable land tenure, pasture, water and fisheries access rights;
- Making illegal registration or trade in Intellectual Property relating to genetic resources used for food and farming;
- Removal of the threat of genetic pollution through the deliberate or accidental release of GMOs;
- Resourcing priorities for Research and Development at all levels that investigate optimal systems; Ensuring prices fully internalise the environmental and social costs of production; as prices rise, develop alternative mechanisms for ensuring food security of poor consumers.

As part of this process there is a need to build up consensus among Development and Environment NGOs on the agreed set of issues.

Work Programme

In an iterative process developed and coordinated by a resource-person:

- ❖ UKFG members will be asked to contribute 'stories' of good practices in the implementation of agro-ecological alternatives by smallholder farmers and the development of localised food systems.
- ❖ Organise this into a some kind of framework and develop ideas of relevant indicators.
- ❖ Policy lessons will be drawn from the information.

The information could then be written up in Fact Packs and be disseminated electronically through the website.

As part of the process, hold a meeting with Development and Environment NGOs, including European partners, to achieve consensus views on these issues and develop alternative agro-ecological proposals (to the GE/Industrial Agriculture paradigm) and agree priorities for Earth Summit III on sustainable agriculture.

The UKFG, through this group, would also support campaigns and lobbies of other organisations e.g. SAFS Caucus (see below), UK Freeze, SUSTAIN (as a partner of their Sustainable Agriculture work programme), and strengthen synergies North/South, Environment/Development.

In addition to the tasks above, the group will continue to play an advocacy and information role, through the UKabc website, on:

- **Sustaining Agricultural Biodiversity:** promoting integrity of ag ecosystems as defining Natural Resource Management principle; developing alternative proposals, including supporting the PELUM Community Seed Security Programme
- **Governance:** FAO/CBD/CSD/WTO, specifically FAO CGRFA/IU; CBD/COP/SBSTTA/Biosafety Protocol, Agricultural Biodiversity Work Programme; CSD --> Earth Summit III; WTO/TRIPS 27.3(b) review
- **GE:** Confronting GE and world hunger/TNC control
- **Benefit sharing :** supporting alternatives to IPR, TRIPs and profit from Life genes

SAFS

The Commission on Sustainable Development's Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security NGO caucus (SAFS Caucus) has invited the UK Food Group to be the focal point for W Europe. This will require activity in the run up to Earth Summit III 'The Life Summit' in 2002 around a set of issues to be agreed with European partners and internationally.

Patrick Mulvany, May 2000 (revised July 200)