

# Scaling Out Agroecology in the South East

The significance of agroecology for indigenous communities, farmworkers, and Black farmers in the South East is defined by a framework that is rooted in a campesino - a - campesino model of co - learning. It supports reclaiming traditional and ancestral knowledge which serves as the foundation for social and ecological transformation.

It further incorporates the politics and history of migration, economy, and small-scale agriculture with a clear understanding that:

- industrial agriculture and U.S. trade policies have forced people to abandon their traditional ways of growing and providing food for their families and communities;
- climate, human & environmental health is severely impacted by corporate agriculture's dependence on toxic pesticides, chemical inputs, and monoculture practices
- indigenous communities, farmworkers, and small-scale farmers of color in the U.S. are central to sharing authentic, lived-experiences and traditional wisdom of food production, resource



Women and Youth members of the Campesinos' Gardens in Fellsmere present the day's harvest for the market.

*Photo by Alberto Arriola*

conservation, seed keeping and food sovereignty.

The Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF), in collaboration with the Rural Coalition (RC), La Via Campesina North America (LVC-NA), and allies, is applying agroecology as a vehicle to connect farmworkers and farmers in the

justice movements internationally, and to engage them in a process that reawakens agricultural heritage; utilizes shared practice, participatory research and experimentation; and examines socio-economic models of production that are community-based, with the contributions of Black and Brown women and youth at its core.

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## Campesinos' Gardens

Established in 1983, the Farmworker Association of Florida builds power among farmworkers and rural low-income communities to respond to and gain control over the social, political, economic, workplace, health, and environmental justice issues that impact their lives. FWAF has grown to include more than 10,000 member families, with offices in five farmworker communities and an increasingly important role in the food sovereignty movement.

An expanding facet of FWAF's work is providing farmworkers - most of whom work on large, conventional farms - with opportunities to apply and experiment with agroecological techniques to grow healthy, organic produce for their families and for local markets. The idea for the Campesinos' Gardens originated in 2009 in the citrus-growing region of Fellsmere. After many months of planning, the first garden site was established in 2010. In years since, produce from the gardens has reached more than 100 families annually. Using the research and lessons learned, FWAF is in the process of scaling out this model to emerging Campesinos' Gardens in Homestead/Florida City, Pierson, and Apopka. Each location will be utilized as a source for community food production and a campesino-a-campesino co-learning and experimentation center, with the long-term goal of establishing a farmworker-to-farmer training program rooted in agroecology.



# Joint Initiative for an Agroecology Encuentro

Currently, the planning phase for an Agroecology Encuentro to be held at the Campesinos' Gardens in Florida, linking local and international social movements, is underway. Fellow U.S. LVC member organizations - RC, National Family Farm Coalition, and Border Agricultural Workers Project - are engaged at various levels in agroecological processes and support this encounter scheduled for approximately one week in late January 2015. The goal of the pilot Encuentro is to support further development of LVC-NA regional agroecology principles and to build capacity through campesino-led agroecology processes that are centered on campesino organizing and knowledge-sharing, and that are designed to meet the needs of farmers, farmworkers, women, and youth in rural communities across the South East.

Joint efforts for the South East agroecology process have evolved for the last 5 years and continue to transform,

steeped in the rich agrarian history and knowledge of farmworkers and small farmers. FWAF's Campesinos' Garden methodology, coupled with RC's exploration of cooperative economic models in the South East and engagement of an RC National Agroecology Field Organizer and the RC Field Coordinator in Central Florida, uniquely poised the collaboration to move forward. As capacity strengthened through involvement in international agroecology exchanges where knowledge is shared and political, economic, and social dynamics are expressed from the campesino perspective, so too did the commitment to advance the principles of agroecology and food sovereignty among campesinos in the U.S.

Some of the exchanges that respected women and youth community leaders participated in include: large movement gatherings in Mexico (2010), the First LVC Continental Agroecology Encuentro in Guatemala (2011), the Second International Encounter in



2014 Strategic Agroecology Planning Session with members of FWAF, Rural Coalition, and La Via Campesina North America

Thailand (2012); with the Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños (ANAP) in Cuba (2013); and on multiple occasions in Brazil with MST (Landless Workers Movement) and the MAB (Movement of Dam Affected Peoples).

Early this year, FWAF hosted LVC-NA's Regional Meeting in Central Florida where plans were put in place for agroecology in the region. The US Food Sovereignty Alliance and other allies have shown support of this long-awaited Agroecology Encuentro.

Globalize struggle,  
globalize hope !

Globalize  
Agroecology !

The creation of a  
network of peasant  
agroecology schools in  
LVC is key to food  
sovereignty.



La Via Campesina North American Regional Meeting held in Central Florida, January 2014

## MORE THAN A METHOD, A MOVEMENT: LINKING LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

La Via Campesina is the largest peasant movement in the world with over 40 agroecology learning centers across the globe, and significant contributions to peasant-led agroecology for food sovereignty. At the North American Regional Meeting earlier this year, LVC-NA members, which include groups from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, committed to:

- campesino-led agroecology processes, driven by organizing campesino-a-campesino exchanges and knowledge-sharing
- advancement of the campesino-a-campesino model of popular education, knowledge, culture, and food production
- development of agroecology and seed keeping processes in North America that will contribute to and link to the international movement on agroecology and seed sovereignty
- application and refinement of agroecology principles for the region

- coordinate an agroecology encounter in the S.E. U.S. for campesino-a-campesino exchanges that include international movement participants
- link and demonstrate the relationship between agroecology and food sovereignty
- engage, lead, and advance the domestic debate on agroecology, and seed and food sovereignty
- highlight the connections between the struggles of farmworkers and migrant labor across the region with the struggle for sustainable peasant agroecology
- strengthen collective models of organization and leadership by women and youth

The publication *From Maputo to Jakarta: 5 Years of Agroecology in La Via Campesina* sends a call for peasant-led agroecology that contributes to the development of a social movement of all peoples struggling to construct a new society. Now, the challenge and the invitation for the U.S. is to step up to the call.