



Farmers' Link

Statement to contribute to the UKFG and Sustain dialogue on agricultural trade reform, subsidies, and the future of small and family farms

Farmers Link's objectives are to promote mutual understanding between farmers around the world, raise awareness among consumers in the UK and contribute to discussions on agricultural policy.

Seeking to promote sustainable agriculture we are acutely aware of the difficulties facing small farmers globally. Not only are they working with changing technology and climate, trade rules impact heavily on their economic viability. We recognise that the conventional model of industrial agriculture, endorsed by the governments of developed countries and the TNCs who profit from the existing system, contravenes sustainable principles by:

- The high level of inputs (energy and chemical)
- Resource depletion (soil, fuel and generation of waste)
- Wildlife impacts
- Consolidation of wealth and power
- Excessive transportation of goods

We seek to explore the similarities of the experiences of farmers and to examine the economic pressures that seem to benefit TNCs, processors and retailers over and above producers and consumers. By bringing farmers closer together we hope they are able to derive inspiration from each other and greater strength to lobby for change. We are keen to draw attention to all strategies that benefit producers and consumers, for example direct selling, which ensures best value for both buyer and seller. We are not opposed to diversification out of farming but we consider that farmers have a right to remain farmers, rather than become entrepreneurial businessmen.

We would like to see farmers reconciled to the fact that subsidies have not ultimately 'saved' many farmers (there continues to be a high rate of farmers leaving the land with the dominant buyers in land markets – in Britain - being investors from S. England) with much of the subsidy value siphoned off by processors and traders such that farmers may be left with all the bureaucracy and restrictions and little of the rewards. We note with some disappointment that there is no ceiling on CAP payments.

Unless the WTO, the EC and the UK government make a concerted effort to curb the influence of corporate control of food systems the future of farming is unlikely to be the diverse and locally relevant food production that the majority of people wish to support. It will be increasingly in the control of a very few multinational companies who may thus also decide the quality and type of foods that particular countries have access to.

In our efforts to advocate more equitable and sustainable food systems we:

- actively support initiatives such as Race to the Top and other alliances responding to policy discussions
- hold SARD meetings with farmers and rural representatives in East Anglia to discuss a range of concerns
- work with others to raise awareness in schools and among consumers of the effects of their food choices

- have recently published 'Linking Lives & Livelihoods', a collection of farmers' stories from around the world
- are organising a conference in spring 2004 to bring farmers together to consider strategies for both individual economic viability and a wider strength and cohesion for negotiating change in policy.