



# THE RAM'S HORN

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF FOOD SYSTEM ANALYSIS

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## The Food Movement: From reform to revolution?

The 'Food Movement' now enjoys consistent and extensive coverage in the food and life style sections of major newspapers. Here and there are signs that it is moving beyond the individualism characteristic of western societies, but the media generally presents it as a life-style issue, or a personal health issue. This is just where Big Food wants it to be – and stay. As long as the foodies are preoccupied with individual health and choice, the public will be distracted from seeing the structural issues and Big Food's control of the food system will remain intact.

This is of course a rather incomplete picture. There is a subversive element at work in this food movement, like a healthy yeast, and it has been working/fermenting for a couple of decades and more.

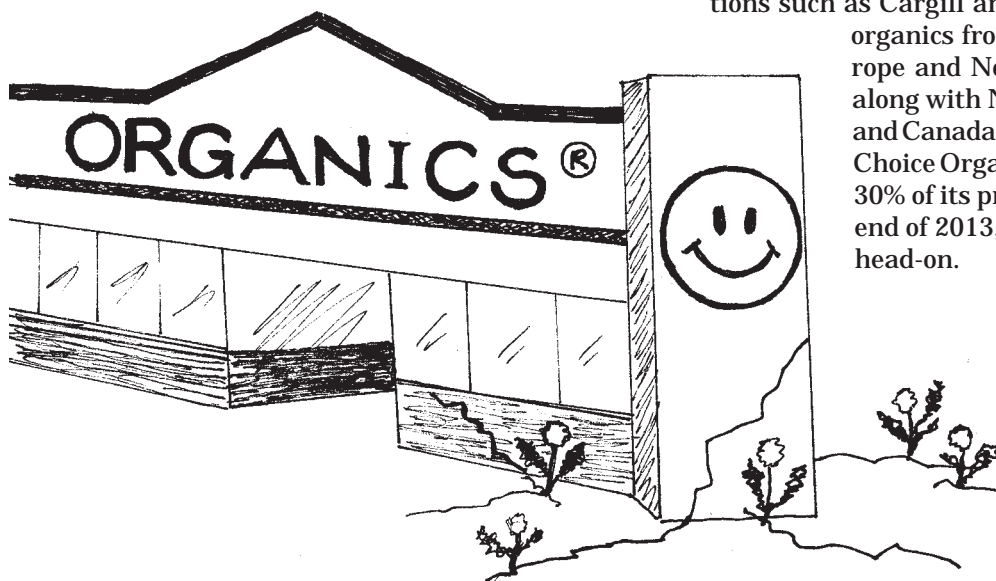
First people started looking for agROTOXIN-free food for themselves and their children, while farmers got together to build a framework and set standards to assure the integrity of what was called "organic". People formed buying clubs to help source the kind and quality of food they wanted from wholesalers or direct from farmers. Farmers' markets and CSAs started sprouting

up all over the country, emerging like dandelions in spring and spreading like quack grass with its very aggressive (underground) rhizomes. Co-ops for production, processing, and distribution were formed. People started urban gardens and collective kitchens. The explosion of local initiatives, particularly in the past few years, has been truly amazing.

At the same time, organic food was being moved in the direction of mainstream with gorgeous grocery stores like Capers in Vancouver, The Big Carrot in Toronto, Whole Foods, and a few others around the country. Organic food companies like Nature's Path appeared to supply the increasing demand for organic foods and food products and Organic Meadow Cooperative took off as a national supplier of organic dairy products and more. Mother Nature was certainly pleased with the implications of these developments. Any reduction in the use of agROTOXINS was good, and these companies worked closely with local food providers.

More recently we have seen Big Food take a strong interest in organics all along the chain, but most noticeably in retail; at the same time transnational corporations such as Cargill and Bunge have been trading in organics from Brazil and Argentina to Europe and North America, and now China, along with Nestlé, Unilever and Starbucks and Canada's own Viterra. From President's Choice Organics to Walmart's pledge to buy 30% of its produce locally in Canada by the end of 2013, the global is tackling the local head-on.

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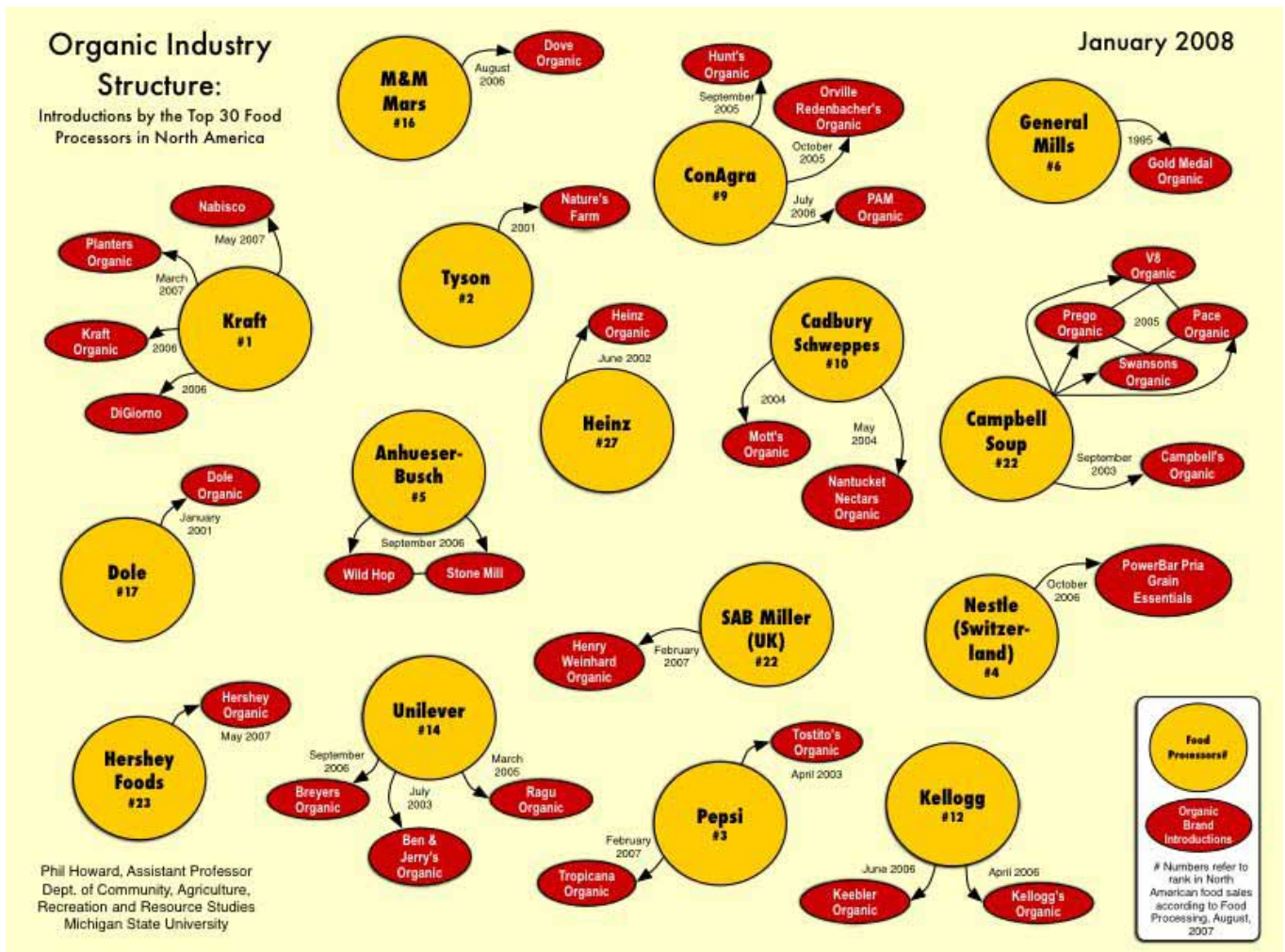
As we have noted in recent issues of The Ram's Horn, one of the factors facilitating large-scale organic food production and marketing, and with it, global trading, has been the development and legal recognition of organic standards. Direct market relationships are based in trust (backed up, in the case of organics, by the organic certification process); beyond arm's reach, however, organic certification replaces the personal relationship by ensuring adherence to organic standards.

To put it simply, organics could become just another line of 'product' competing for shelf-space in the superstore and field-space alongside the genetically engineered crops. Indeed, this may already be the case, prompting fears that the entire organic and local food movement may become an irrelevant appendix, as people take the easy path of one-stop shopping for products with an 'ethical' label. Whether or not the standards being used are tough and reliable (and the burden of toxins on the planet is lightened), this route still reinforces the agribusiness empires of Big Food, based as they are on the maximization of profits (shareholder value) rather than on the construction of a healthy society in a healthy ecology.

The question now is whether the food movement, and especially organic food, will simply become one specialized stream of giant agribusiness – a reform movement, one might say, which is largely succeeding – or a revolutionary movement that might undermine, or even eventually overthrow, Big Food.

Through initiatives like the People's Food Policy Project, there is a small but growing determination for the food movement to become a challenger to the entire structure of the industrial food system – a broad, global social movement to undermine and overthrow over the current corporate-welfare food system, from giant GE soy plantations in Brazil and Argentina, to oil palm plantations in Malaysia, to Monsanto corn in the USA and canola in Canada.

This will be no 'fast and precise' revolution, and unlike the biotech revolution's attacks on the organism it will continue to be non-violent. There will be no military heroes glorified in the press. Instead, there will be hundreds, if not thousands, of local leaders and heroes who organize small, and sometimes large, autonomous food production, processing and distribution projects and businesses that will remove customers



from the corporate markets, whether for seeds, tractors, agrottoxins, crops, or food.

It can be expected that a giant advertising (propaganda) campaign will be waged against the growing subversion of Big Food, and there will certainly be sabotage, as demonstrated already with the contamination of crops with GMOs.

The food movement will find its strength, as so many people already have, in the social relations that characterize CSAs, farmers markets, community gardens and kitchens, local food businesses, and much more. The loneliness of market economy individualism will shrink away in the face of the social solidarity of the new food economy that is constructed to meet the daily needs of its community.

Does this sound too romantic, too idealistic? We don't think so. What can be more idealistic than thinking that a global food system dedicated to corporate profit can ever feed the hungry of the world? And is thinking that a major aspect of food is – or should be – the grateful enjoyment of it together with friends and family rally a 'romantic' notion from another era of human existence?

Certainly it is idealistic to think that Mother Nature can withstand indefinitely the agrotxin assault of industrial agriculture or the attack of genetic manipulation. Judging from the evidence of weather chaos and environment-linked disease, it looks like Mother Nature is already refusing to put up with such bad behaviour.

To think that there is really enough for all, and that we do not need to desecrate and destroy the planet in order to survive is neither romantic nor idealistic. It is just the starting point for a new economy.

An economic system founded on the principle of capital accumulation can have no other outcome than the production of inequity. In a finite world, capital accumulation requires deprivation. If the economy is structured so that a few will get much more, then more must get less. Even cursory reading of the business press makes it abundantly clear that the wealthy have benefited hugely by the economic turmoil of the past three years thanks to government wealth transfers from governments (the public) to private corporations so that the system will not collapse.

*The wealthiest 1% of Americans. . . now pocket nearly one quarter of the country's income. They also control as much as half of total wealth, including property, bank accounts, investments, art and the like. And their share of the pie has roughly doubled in the past four*

*decades. Income is more evenly shared in Canada, but not by much, and the trend toward greater concentration at the top is identical. Between the mid '90s and the mid-'20s, income inequality grew faster in Canada than in all but one of the 17 leading developed countries.*

*. . . [In] Sweden . . . roughly 32% of the country's wealth is in the hands of the richest 20% .*

*– Barrie McKenna, GM, 4/10/10*

To repeat: a reformist food movement will certainly benefit the environment to some extent, it will also improve individual diets and health; but it will not address the underlying system of control, wealth accumulation, and the production of inequity. To address these iniquities, the food movement will have to understand itself as a revolutionary movement building a society based on equity and sufficiency.



An excellent explication of the social effects of inequity in a society can be found in *The Spirit Level*, by Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett. (*Penguin 2009/10*) The authors describe how, in the course of their research, they "became aware that almost all problems which are more common at the bottom of the social ladder are more common in more unequal societies. It is not just ill-health and violence, but also . . . a host of other social problems. Almost all of them contribute to the widespread concerns that modern societies are, despite their affluence, social failures." To see whether these problems were more common in more unequal countries, "we collected internationally comparable data on health and as many social problems as we could find reliable figures for. The list we ended up with included:

- ◆ level of trust
- ◆ mental illness (including drug and alcohol addiction)
- ◆ life expectancy and infant mortality
- ◆ obesity
- ◆ children's educational performance
- ◆ teenage births
- ◆ homicides
- ◆ imprisonment rates
- ◆ social mobility"

Their conclusion: "The problems in rich countries are not caused by the society not being rich enough (or even by being too rich) but by the scale of material differences between people within each society being too big. . . . If you fail to avoid high inequality, you will need more prisons and more police. You will have to deal with higher rates of mental illness, drug abuse and every other kind of problem."



Our Prime Minister seems to be bent on increasing inequity and social mistrust in Canada, so rather than altering the tax structure to reduce inequity, he has chosen to create more criminals and to build more prisons to house them. Further, he has chosen to militarize Canada so that the inevitable social unrest can be controlled. 'Security' measures at the G20 meeting in Toronto were really a training exercise.

As we said above, the food movement is built on trust. The food system reform movement might be said

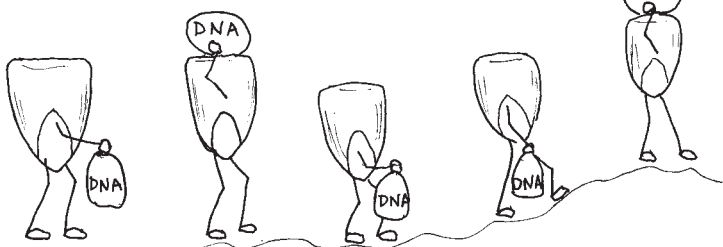
to put its trust in standards and regulations, while the radical food movement puts its trust in its social relations. As Wilkinson and Pickett point out, "high levels of trust are linked to low levels of inequality", which is why, for example, Food Secure Canada is based on the inextricable links between zero hunger, population health, environmental integrity, social justice, and sustainable livelihoods for food providers.

The seeds of a non-violent revolutionary change have been planted.

## Biotech in Europe

The European Commission, the administrative body of the European Union, has been a strong and consistent supporter of GE crops and foods. When the states making up the European Union cannot form a qualified majority to refuse a license for a new GE crop, the European Commission can make a decision on its own, and it is invariably in favour of GE – which makes this latest report from the European Commission, entitled *Europeans and biotechnology in 2010*, particularly interesting.

"GM food is still the Achilles' heel of biotechnology. The wider picture is of declining support across many of the EU Member States – on average opponents outnumber supporters by three to one, and in no country is there a majority of supporters. What is driving the continued opposition to GM food? Public concerns about safety are paramount, followed by the perceived absence of benefits and worry – GM food is seen as unnatural and makes many Europeans 'uneasy'. Across the period 1996-2010, we see, albeit with fluctuations, a downward trend in the percentage of supporters. Denmark and the UK, at the higher end of the distribution of support, are exceptions, as is Austria, at the lower end. Those among the 'old' EU countries with a ban on GM crops in place consistently show low values of support, with Italy joining the group. In contrast, Member States where GM crops are grown tend to show among the highest values, suggesting a link between private attitudes and public policies."



## Stronger GE assessment requirements

Coincidentally, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has set out new assessment procedures for biotech companies when submitting GM plants for EU approval. When assessing the environmental impact of a GM plant, the EFSA now says that all applicants are to follow its guidance documents which specify the type of data and information that should be submitted, including "the persistence and invasiveness of the GM plant, taking into account possible plant-to-plant gene transfer; the likelihood and consequences of gene transfer from the plant to micro-organisms; the potential evolution of resistance in target organisms; the potential effects on non-target organisms; the biogeochemical processes, such as changes in soil composition, and the potential impact of the cultivation, management and harvesting techniques of the GM plant."

– European Food Safety Authority, 12/11/10

## South Africa's corn glut

Amid all the talk about commodity prices and the urgency of growing more food, South Africa has a troublesome 4-million ton surplus of maize, and farmers are having trouble selling their crops. This has led to dire warnings that more than 10,000 commercial farmers are facing bankruptcy or a lack of finance for next year's crop. The surplus has also raised fears that farmers who do survive will turn to other crops and so possibly create a shortage of the African staple.

An investigation conducted by a team of officials from the Department of Agriculture and the National Agriculture Marketing Council recommended that South Africa "aggressively" move toward producing more yellow corn to meet demand from Taiwan, Japan and South Korea and suggested setting up an agency to promote exports. South Africa, the biggest producer of the grain in Africa, grows

mainly white corn. This year's harvest is expected to be the biggest since 1982 at 13.04 million metric tonnes. In South Africa white corn is used to make corn meal, a staple food, while yellow corn is mainly fed to animals. *Many of SA's neighbouring states will not import its maize because much of it is genetically modified.* [emphasis added] *- Bloomberg, 9/11/10*

## Won't – or can't – stand still

Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass has been found in Eastern Oregon's Malheur County. Oregon State University weed scientist Carol Mallory-Smith said the genetically modified bentgrass is growing in several miles of irrigation canals and on field borders. Mallory-Smith was alerted to the presence of the plant by a Malheur County resident who discovered the grass couldn't be taken out with Roundup. The resident contacted Mallory-Smith and sent her a sample. The sample tested positive for the transgenic gene. Mallory-Smith said she has been to the area twice since the Oct. 14 discovery and found the genetically engineered bentgrass in large canals, laterals and spreading up from canals into fields. Mallory-Smith speculated the plants originated from seed that spread from a seed field planted to the grass in 2005 just across the river from Malheur County near Parma, Idaho. Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass is being developed by the Scotts Co. for the golf-course market. The grass has been tied up in the federal deregulation process since 2003, when Scotts and Monsanto Co. first petitioned the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to deregulate the crop. *- Capital Press, USA, 10/11/10*



## Truth in packaging

Responding to health concerns about possible carcinogens in its polystyrene containers, the organic yogurt company Stonyfield Farm Inc. has switched to a plastic made from corn: polylactic acid or PLA, a polymer made from corn – by Cargill. Stonyfield admits while its PLA package is made from a renewable source and not fossil fuels, it isn't perfect – because of the energy, pesticides and genetically modified seeds that go into growing the corn, which is also a food source. And there's only one U.S. facility that recycles PLA. *- AP, 15/10/10*

## Japan eager for P.E.I.'s non-GMO canola

P.E.I. is growing more canola than ever before, fulfilling a demand for oilseed that is not contaminated with genetically modified crops. This year 15, Island farmers grew 1,200 hectares of non-genetically modified canola.

It's difficult to find places in the world where buyers can be confident the seed is free from contamination from genetically modified crops. Genetically modified canola is not grown on P.E.I., and this attracted Kosaku Morita of the Japanese company Marumo to the Island. "Japanese consumers started worrying about not having enough non-GMO canola for using [for] their cooking oil," Morita told CBC News last week. *- CBC, 8/11/10*

The Flax testing program carried out by the Flax Council of Canada has found widespread contamination of the crop with genetically engineered Triffid flax. More than 6000 samples, taken from commercial deliveries as well as from pedigreed and farm-saved seed, were tested, with about 10% of them testing positive for CDC Triffid at the level of 0.01% or more. The testing is costly and time-consuming, but has been a prerequisite to being able to ship flax seed to Europe. "How a flax variety that was never commercialized became so prevalent in the countryside remain an unsolved mystery" according to the Western Producer story (19/8/10). Of course nobody would ever dare to suggest that Alan McHughen, the constructor of Triffid and its patent holder, intended just that – distributing free samples to all and sundry as part of his book promotion – and that Monsanto was surely delighted with his success.

## "The choosing experience"

"... more offerings for customers may not be a good thing. Too much choice confuses buyers, and they will often procrastinate or walk away." Columbia University Business School offers four strategies for easing the customer's burden. #1, "Cut the number of options. This is the most obvious, but companies avoid it, worried they might give up shelf space to competitors. But the authors argue that careful trimming can lower costs and increase sales by improving the choosing experience for customers." They then describe how Proctor & Gamble cut their 26 varieties of Head & Shoulders anti-dandruff shampoo down to 15, with the result that sales increased 15%. *- G&M, 11/10/10*

# HAITI: Security for What?

This report on Haiti may seem a bit off topic for The Ram's Horn but our approach to analysis of the food system has always been based on justice and the basic necessities of life, two 'commodities' that have long been in short supply for Haiti. Clearly, after the earthquake the availability of food became an even bigger issue than normal for Haitians, along with shelter. Now cholera is opportunistically spreading amongst a population largely without adequate food and water. The response of the Harper regime in Canada seems to be to criminalize the population and provide shelter in prisons. This is not surprising given Harper's obsession with 'security' (i.e., militarization) over justice – as made clear by his actions in closing the prison farms and building new prisons in Canada – but to extend this to the destitute and hungry people of Haiti in the name of 'aid' is truly immoral and disgusting .

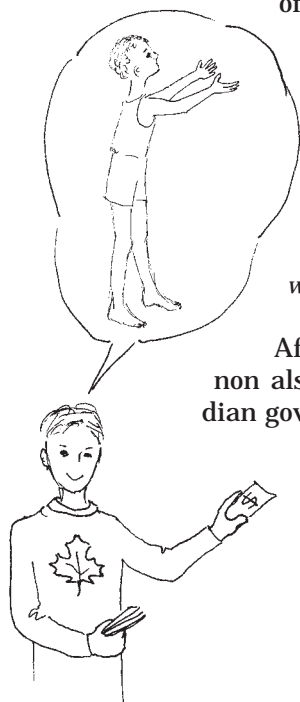
## Canada's Aid to Haiti:

*Building jails, equipping police, and building homes (and an embassy) for its diplomats*

In April, 2010, the Canadian International Development Agency announced that it was directing \$34 million towards equipping of the Haitian National Police. In May, Minister of Foreign Affairs Lawrence Cannon presided over the opening of a new prison in Croix de Bouquets, for which Canada had already contributed \$4.4 million for construction, and announced an "additional" \$10 million from Canada for building prisons and equipping the Haitian National Police. Canada has committed to helping make the prison operational through the presence of Correctional Service Canada officers, who will train and mentor their Haitian counterparts. The new Port-au-Prince area detention centre will reduce overcrowding, helping improve prisoners' health and safety.

(With thanks to Roger Annis and the Canada Haitian Action Network: [www.canadahaitiaction.ca](http://www.canadahaitiaction.ca))

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon also announced that the Canadian government is sending more po-



lice officers to Haiti and will spend \$9.5 million to help build the new headquarters of the country's national police force. Canada already has 134 police officers in Haiti, compared with 90 before last January's earthquake. Canada will also spend \$1.3 million to train about 7,000 police officers over the next two years in first-aid. "Through this assistance program, Canada is providing for the purchase of equipment to allow the Haitian national police to patrol on land and on sea, and the construction of facilities of both corrections and police sectors," Cannon said.

- Canadian Press, CBC News 4/11/10

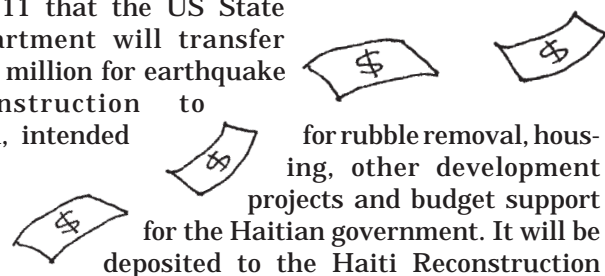
## New embassy and homes for staff in Haiti

The Canadian embassy and some diplomatic residences in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, were damaged by the January earthquake, and government documents show Canadian taxpayers have already paid \$1.4 million for "emergency repairs" to the embassy and \$1.7 million for temporary staff housing. Now the government's annual public accounts state that \$5.6 million is to be spent on land for a new embassy, ambassador's residence and "staff quarter," all in Port-au-Prince. But in a written response to questions from CBC News, Foreign Affairs replied: "The \$5.6 million represents land acquisition costs intended for the eventual construction of residential housing" for the 24 Canadian diplomats in Haiti. "Two large tracts of land are in the process of being acquired for the eventual construction of permanent housing for all Canadian diplomatic staff." Foreign Affairs has not yet released estimates of how much more it will cost to actually build the 24 homes.

A scan of online real estate listings for Haiti suggests that for the same amount of money currently being spent on vacant lots, the Canadian government could be buying its diplomats some nice existing homes, including the land. A majority of Canada's diplomats posted around the world live in rented accommodations.

- CBC News, 5/11/10

Public radio in San Francisco (WBAI) reported on Nov 11 that the US State Department will transfer \$120 million for earthquake reconstruction to Haiti, intended for rubble removal, housing, other development projects and budget support for the Haitian government. It will be deposited to the Haiti Reconstruction Fund, which nominally has the say on where the funds will be spent. The money amounts to approximately 10% of the \$1.15 billion promised by the U.S. at the UN donors conference on March 31 for 2010/11. It has taken the US seven months to get the funds flowing.





There appears to be no indication that the Canadian Government aid (as opposed to the work of small independent non-government organizations) is helping Haitians move back to the countryside and get set up to produce food for themselves and their communities.

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## Land: Two different Stories

The wild, rolling land here [in Neepawa, Manitoba]. . . hosts a wide range of native prairie plants and the Langford Community Pasture has the feeling of a nature preserve. But give the ground a good kick and you'll easily boot away the thin cover of vegetation and create a small cloud of dust and shower of sand.

This sandy, dusty soil is the reason local municipalities, the federal agriculture department and the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corp. came together Oct. 1 to lock up most of the almost 10,000 acre pasture so that it can never be broken.

But recently the potato industry has expanded and sandy soil above a rich aquifer is ideal for that type of farming. Potato producers have requested permission to break up some of the land and that's what local municipalities, cattle producers, habitat conservation authorities and water resource organizations are trying to avoid.

"A guy could come in and break this up to grow potatoes, but if the market went down he'd walk away, and all this land would blow right into Lake Manitoba," said William Pottinger, a councillor in the Rural Municipality of Lansdowne, one of the two local governments that signed away their control of the land that day.

Langford reeve Kathy Jasiencyk said the infertile soil wasn't broken because dryland farmers couldn't use it. Then the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration began managing it. "Under PFRA management ... the pasture has remained as a heavy repository of native animals and plants," said Jasiencyk. "The sandy soil was never, ever suitable for settlement under past agricultural practices." By preserving land in conservation easements "(the land) can be protected and we have one large tract of land here, showcasing pre-settlement prairie, with all of its intact elements and water beneath for all Canadians in perpetuity." - *WP, 14/10/10*

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Residents of Conquest, Saskatchewan, are concerned about the large numbers of shelter belts being removed in the area. Cor Van Raay, an Alberta feedlot owner who bought 122 quarters near Conquest, hired a crew to clear the land. [A quarter is 1/4 of a section of one square mile, or 160 acres, so 122 quarters is 19,520 acres.] "I thought I did the country a lot of good by getting rid of all these trees ... farming a quarter section rather than little pieces of 40 acres," Van Raay said, adding the shelter belt clearing was necessary to accommodate large farming equipment. . . . Approximately 100 miles of shelter belt has already been bulldozed out, with more to follow," says a neighbouring farmer.

Says one of the Barton brothers who custom farm the land for Van Raay, "There's too many fields out there right now that are too small .... When you start adding up the overlap and the time, it takes away your productivity as far as getting things done."

- *WP, 14/10/10*

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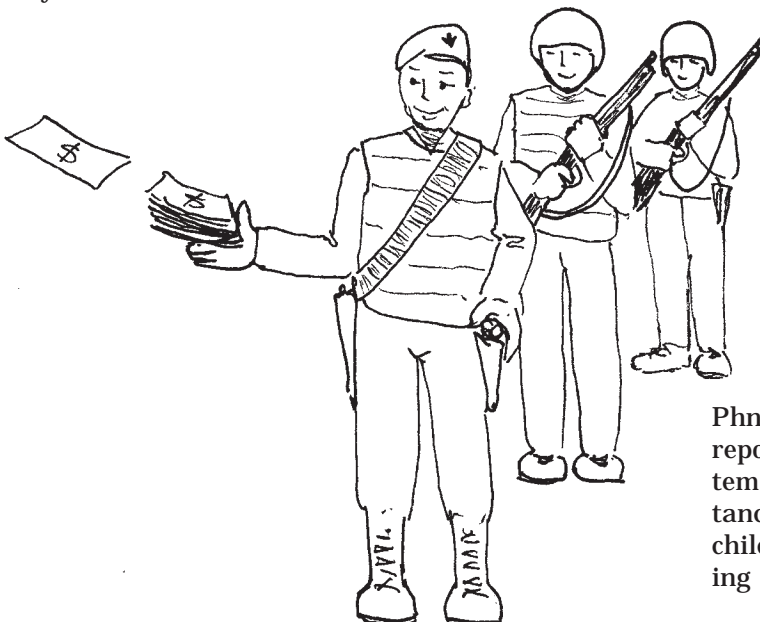
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## What Price Healthy Rivers?

*Edited from a report by Stephen Leahy*

When dams are proposed for power, flood control or irrigation, the often devastating impacts on fisheries in rivers and lakes are ignored or discounted. Damming a river may bring electric power, but often at the cost of high-quality food fisheries.

"It is very difficult to put a dollar value on what inland fisheries represent because it is much more than the landed value of the fish at the dock," says Yumiko Kura of the WorldFish Center office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Kura is co-author of a new report, "Blue Harvest: Inland Fisheries as an Ecosystem Service", which highlights the wide-ranging importance of inland fisheries in diets, especially among children, and not just in terms of protein but in supplying micronutrients, notably vitamin A, calcium, iron



and zinc. "Detailed studies in Bangladesh for example have shown that daily consumption of small fish contributes 40 percent of the total daily household requirement of vitamin A and 31 percent of calcium," according to the report.

In addition, it notes there are more than 60 million full- and part-time jobs in fishing and other activities such as processing, with over half these jobs carried out by women. A river system like the Mekong is amongst the most productive fisheries in the world largely because there are few dams, and it retains most of its wetlands, Kura reports. Fishers in the Mekong catch more than 500 species of fish, its very diversity sustains the health of the river, and some 22 million people in Cambodia and Laos who depend on the Mekong's bounty.

By contrast river systems in developed countries are near biological deserts with few species, according to a landmark study published in the journal *Nature* earlier this month. Paradoxically, rich countries employ vast quantities of concrete for energy and flood control, decimating rivers' natural abilities to control and clean water and provide food, according to the first ever study of the world's river systems.

Japan used to have productive inland fisheries but there are very few left, almost entirely due to development, says Kura, who is from Japan. Many of the country's rivers were lined with concrete in the past two

decades in a short-sighted attempt to control flooding and maintain transport channels. Rivers need to be able to flow to the sea, with shoreline vegetation and wetlands to keep them healthy and productive, she said.

-IPS, Nagoya, Japan, 22/10/10

### *Anniversary*

*For 30 years, The Ram's Horn has offered well-researched analysis of issues in the food system, including stories of the ongoing corporate takeover and on-the-ground resistance.*

*Issue #1 of The Ram's Horn was published in November, 1980, with a price of \$5 for six issues per year. The next year the price rose to \$6 and stayed there until issue #79 in December, 1990, when we raised it to \$15 per year for 11 issues. In April, 1994 we raised the subscription price to \$20 and then years later to \$24 for 10 issues. About a year ago we raised it to \$25 when we redesigned our website and made subscription possible on-line (for which we pay a fee).*

*The Ram's Horn is completely dependent on subscriptions and donations from subscribers. However, each issue is available for free download on the website, along with several of Brewster's books.*



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