

## Rural youth: Make our voices heard!

Like many other organisations, Via Campesina has realised for many years now, how important it is to support young people wanting to start up work or stay on living and working as small farmers in rural areas. During our meetings with young people, whether on a national, European or international scale, we become aware of their common desires and needs, and we want to fight for them.

### ■ What do we propose?

We want to produce healthy and sufficient food in dignified conditions. We want to do this in working conditions that respect nature and humankind: both as producers and consumers. We want to maintain or recreate a partnership with our social fabric, our rural areas and our ecosystem. We want to return to sustainable production and consumer systems.

We know for certain: that we have to abandon the productivist model and all the consequences we know it brings. Our definition of small-scale agriculture – one that is on a human scale, working in a local context, in harmony with environmentally sound practices, incorporating self-determined food security – constitutes a sustainable response that can feed the world and cool-down the planet.

### ■ What are our demands in order for these projects to succeed?

Young people's most demanding needs relate to access to land and access to financing; these are often weighty constraints especially for those who are not already sons or daughters of small farmers. But we also need access to training that matches our needs and not the needs of large-scale agribusiness! Some need technical training or training in organic farming in order to convert operations or start up new ones. Others need training in policy-making and social affairs. Indeed, young people need to and want to make their voices heard. We do not agree with models that

are imposed on us, but we have little or no means to make ourselves heard in high-up places by those who decide for us what we should produce, who we should produce for, with what methods and at what price!

### ■ Young people are the future for food and the earth

In smallholder farming we, young people, are the key to healthy and ecologically sound food production. But, although we respond to a priority basic need of everyone – food –, although we contribute to solving serious environmental problems, little is being done to valorise and develop our inputs and support us in our steps towards change. We want our proposals to be heard at all levels of society, in our families, by the authorities at local, regional, national and international levels. This will make it possible to achieve self-determined food security through small-scale agriculture in dignity by young people and for the world.

#### Access to land, financing and training!

These three aspects of our reality are entwined in the issues mentioned.

- Production systems are often dominated by persons other than the producers themselves, i.e. by large-scale land owners, foreign companies, multinationals.
- Rich countries impose types of products that do not correspond to local production or local needs but instead are export crops or agrofuels.
- The evolution of production technologies matches the needs and wishes of producers. While some are not made available, others pose a threat. GMOs are a prime issue – we do not want them; on the contrary, we need to obtain the right to produce local seeds adapted to our needs and specificities and that belong to us!
- The rural exodus of young people pulls them towards more lucrative and value-adding employment that makes large-scale enterprises even larger and prevents small farmers from taking a good stand.
- Climate change is lowering agricultural productivity, small-scale producers suffer although the agribusiness model is the main source of these emissions. Small-scale agriculture on the other hand, will make it possible to limit global warming.



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