



## Farmers Share Knowledge, Seeds, Experience for Sustainable Agriculture

The consequences of agribusiness are grim: decimated forests, climate change, landless peasant farmers, despoiled air and water. Yet agroecology – the science and practices designed to rebuild diverse, just, and sustainable agricultural systems – promises a far different reality.

And thanks to people like you, it's spreading through events like the recent Agroecology Learning Exchange that Grassroots International supported in Brazil.

The Popular Peasant Movement (MCP), a Grassroots International partner in Brazil, recently hosted this exchange, which brought together grassroots organizations from around the globe. The event gave farmers a chance to share knowledge, experience, seeds, and struggle.

Such learning exchanges play a critical role in creating opportunities for small-scale farmers to share agricultural practices that are healthy for communities and for the earth, while also strategizing together around how to organize against the forces which threaten their very existence – land grabs, corporate control of seeds, and the dominance of industrial agriculture.

A highlight of the exchange was a rousing speech by Valdir Misnerovicz, a representative of the Landless Workers Movement (MST), who summarized the struggle this way:

“Our society right now has two distinct projects: one project represents life, the other project represents death. The project of death doesn't care about people, it only cares about capital; it doesn't want to produce food, it wants to produce products ... Peasant farmers don't produce commodities, they produce food. Peasant farming is the farming of hope.”

Grassroots International's continued solidarity with farming communities is a vital ingredient in the struggle for just and sustainable agriculture – a key ingredient to a better world. ■



## Calling for Elections in Haiti

An elected official's job is to represent the interests of the people. But what happens when no one is elected?

In Haiti there have been no elections for Senate seats, the Chamber of Deputies, and local offices since the current administration came into power in 2011. The Senate alone is short one-third of its members. As a result the people's government is crippled and the country teeters on the brink of dictatorship.

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## Courage and Endurance Pay Off for Brazilian Family

**M**aria Elena dreamed of a house and a piece of land where she could grow food. Geraldo de Matos Barbosa wanted to be a carpenter.

To many people, these sound like simple hopes, but for people like Geraldo and Maria Elena – landless, impoverished workers in Brazil – they often seemed like impossible dreams.

Still, Maria Elena and Geraldo believed in their dreams – and were ready to work for them. That’s why they joined the Landless Workers Movement (MST), a longtime Grassroots partner that works to organize landless farmers to win the rights to unused land.



Before joining the MST, Geraldo says, “I had no idea about the meaning of politics and how politics impacted our lives. Now I know that there is no such thing as a poor country. Poverty is fabricated by the system.”

After 13 years – including six years living with other families in a dusty encampment and six violent evictions – Geraldo, Maria Elena and the other families secured the collective title to their land.

Now Maria Elena cooks food she grows herself, and Geraldo’s workmanship is evident not only in their home but in projects around the community.

But the dream is not done. Now, with the support and solidarity of the MST and Grassroots International, Maria Elena and Geraldo are passionately sharing their recipe for success with others in Brazil.



“We need to have the courage and character to transform the society,” Geraldo says. “I transformed my life and will continue working to transform the lives of all peasants in Brazil.” ■

*Geraldo and Maria Elena (pictured above) are pursuing their dreams thanks to supporters like you!*

## Letter from the Director

“Peasant farmers don’t produce commodities, they produce food. Peasant farming is the farming of hope.” That’s what Grassroots International’s partner in Brazil, Valdir Misnerovicz recently told us during a learning exchange.

Grassroots International has played a critical role in standing with and supporting small farmers and land rights activists like Valdir who are leading the charge to create a healthy, sustainable and empowering food system. Or, as he says, a project that represents life.

As the stories in this newsletter show, Grassroots International and our global partners are skillfully and courageously choosing to grow food (not products), to create life and not the death that comes from land grabs, corporate control of seeds and other dead-end options. Your support of Grassroots International and your solidarity with peoples movements are essential to the kinds of successes and struggles you’ll read about in this newsletter.

- **The relentless struggle of Maria Elena and Geraldo, as part of the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, resulted in a new life, on land they now hold title to.**
- **Even in the face of significant obstacles, the Women’s Empowerment and Food Sovereignty Project is building locally controlled food systems in Palestine.**
- **The Via Campesina stands up for migrants worldwide, pushing for an alternative model of rights of works, food sovereignty and environmental sustainability.**
- **Human rights advocates in Haiti refuse to give up on democracy in their nation, instead training and organizing people throughout the country.**
- **Farmers from around the world exchanged knowledge, solidarity and “recipes” for agrarian reform, seed saving and building sustainable movements.**

These are just a few of the powerful and transformational projects Grassroots International is proud to be a part of, with your support.

And I am proud to join you in this endeavor as Grassroots International’s Executive Director. In the very few months that I have been here, my admiration for and inspiration from these global movements has only been matched by my connection with the amazing donors and allies who stand with us.

In gratitude and partnership,  
Chung-Wha Hong

# A Day to Honor and Stand Up for Migrants

International Migrants Day serves as a pressing reminder of the injustice migrant workers face in this country, and around the world. Carlos Marentes, Sr., La Via Campesina - North America Regional Co-Coordinator and director of Centro De Los Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos (the Border Agricultural Workers Center) in El Paso, Texas sees this struggle daily.

“Many workers face dangerous conditions in the construction industry and many die or get injured,” he says. “In the service sector like restaurants, immigrants are often not paid wages at all.”

The prevalence of migrant workers – the United Nations, estimates there are 200 million migrants worldwide – points to other pressing issues as well: many farmers must leave their land because of climate change and the rise of agribusiness.

But Carlos, Grassroots International, La Via Campesina and other global

partners involved in this struggle know the ingredients for change. “We have to restore our families and make our communities whole. Workers demanding on one side and consumers on the other, can push for an alternative model of rights of workers, food sovereignty and environmental sustainability.”

On this past International Migrants Day, Carlos expressed hope: “Sometimes having a small victory like a worker withholding work to successfully get better pay for a bucket of chilies, is a victory that is sweet like honey. The building of our farm worker center, creating this precious space for freedom, is a great victory.”

Long-term relationships between Grassroots International and partners like Carlos and the Border Agricultural Workers Center are a vital ingredient for success, allowing for the sustained advocacy required to achieve significant, long-lasting change. ■

## Palestinian Women Empowered

Food sovereignty is the leaven – the yeast – in the bread of life. But for Palestinian families, imported foods are subsidized, food aid creates food dependence, and farmland is confiscated. As a result, Palestinian farmers face extreme hardship.

Yet, even in the face of significant obstacles, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, a Grassroots International partner, is kneading in the ingredients it will take for Palestinians to build a

locally controlled, family-based farming sector.

And key to this is the Women’s Empowerment and Food Sovereignty Project. Through this project, low-income, rural Palestinian women learn how to grow nutritious food for their families while also generating much-needed income.

Beekeeping, poultry-raising, and olive-growing projects are all improving the quality of life for



*Palestinian women are learning how to grow food, generate income and become leaders.*

these women, their families, and communities. Yet the project is also about empowering women to be leaders who are helping to shape the future of their nation.

“Being a member of this women’s cooperative is so much more than learning technical skills,” said Zeinab Mo’han, member of Beitin Women’s Cooperative in Palestine.

“We also learn about how to engage in discourse, how to negotiate, effective communication skills and, just as importantly, the role of the rights to land, food and water in our national struggle.” ■



*Carlos Marentes, Sr., is the North America Regional Co-Coordinator, representing the region on the International Coordinating Committee.*

## Everyone has a right to land, water and food, which is why you can count on my support now!

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## Elections in Haiti... *Continued from cover page*

But Grassroots' partner the Platform of Haitian Human Rights Organizations (POHDH) is calling for elections and cooking up social change that begins with the people.

Already POHDH is gathering staple ingredients for a more vibrant democracy: training people throughout the country on human rights, documenting and following up on human rights violations, and educating women and children about their rights as people and as citizens.

Five years after the tragic earthquake that devastated Haiti, thousands of

families still live in tent camps.

Today the camps are a focal point for POHDH's outreach, recruitment, and training efforts. If change won't trickle down from the top, POHDH can help it spring up from the camps.

Through Grassroots International, you stand with people raising their voices against dysfunctional democracies. That includes POHDH and others, who will not rest until "justice for all" is achieved. ■

Grassroots International works in partnership with social movements to create a just and sustainable world by advancing human rights to land, water, and food through global grantmaking, building solidarity across organizations and movements, and advocacy in the US. 