“The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime.

And we will be there!”

by

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VOICEs: The Rise of Nongovernmental Voices in Multilateral Organizations
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vía Campesina: Establishing Common Ground in the North and South</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO Spurs Worldwide Agrarian Activism</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Power Behind the WTO</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the WTO</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than One Farmer’s Voice: Empowering an International Peasant Voice</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFAP and the Vía Campesina: Farmers’ Diverging Positions vis-à-vis the WTO</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers’ Different Strategies: Participation Versus Mobilization</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vía Campesina and NGOs</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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VOICES

The Rise of Nongovernmental Voices
in
Multilateral Institutions

Voices is a research project seeking to clarify the state of play in relations between civil society organizations — social movements, NGOs, and other elements — and the major multilateral organizations that govern the world’s economy and much more.

In a series of case studies, Voices aims to identify and compare current practices and relations, examine the motivations of key players, highlight pivotal issues, and identify innovations and lessons learned.

Voices authors include academic observers, policy advisors, independent researchers, and practitioners with movement experience.

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* * *

The World Trade Organization

Coming into being in 1995, the WTO has become both one of the most influential and one of the most controversial multilateral organizations in a very short time. One of the most actively debated elements among its many aspects is that of agriculture and the broader context of food security and the human right to food.

Agriculture is not a monolith, nor do food producers belong to a single category, profession, or class. The impact of a global organization on diverse and complex societies of food producers has itself been diverse and complex. It presents organizations of producers with renewed and difficult challenges. These challenges elicit fascinating responses.

“The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!” presents the story of the organized response of an emerging global network of small producers, the Vía Campesina. This is not a simple tale of engagement and consultative structures within an overall consensus or agreement to participate in a common game. This is a story that challenges the assumptions on which the WTO was founded and continues to operate.
Introduction

Decisions made at the Marrakesh meeting of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in April 1994 were to have a profound impact in the everyday lives of the world’s population. Effectively bringing the eight-year long Uruguay Round to a close, heads of states signed the GATT Final Act and agreed to establish a legal, independent supra-state entity, the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO, established on January 1, 1995, was to be responsible for the implementation of the 22 agreements in areas ranging from agriculture and services to intellectual property rights and genetic resources. The Marrakesh decisions signaled a pronounced shift away from more controlled economies to almost exclusively market-driven economies. With the creation of the WTO, world leaders embarked on a globalizing mission of market liberalization.

The WTO agenda covers so much ground and is so pervasive in its reach that a serious consideration of its total power, impact, and interaction with different actors is simply not possible given the space limitations here. Since agriculture was the major stumbling block in the Uruguay Round — causing the talks to last a full eight years — it is worth examining this sector more closely. This paper will examine the relationship between the WTO and civil society organizations (CSOs) by focusing specifically on agriculture and food security and some of the actors thus engaged. Special attention will be placed on the involvement of farm organizations with the WTO and their interactions with other international social actors. The paper begins by exploring why and how bringing agriculture into the GATT and the WTO spurred international agrarian activism that led to the creation of an international peasant and farm movement, the Vía Campesina. The paper then explores the positions, strategies, and actions of the Via Campesina and their interaction with other social actors working on agriculture and food security and the WTO.

Prior to the Uruguay Round, GATT rules applied mostly to manufactured and industrial goods, with governments expressing little interest in liberalizing agriculture and food. Agricultural development policies that eventually led to the Green Revolution were designed primarily to strengthen national agricultural sectors, increase production, and ensure national food self-sufficiency. Hence, agriculture received special treatment in the GATT through important exemptions (enshrined in Articles XI and XVI) which allowed countries to support and protect their farm sectors through a combination of subsidies, import quotas, and tariff quotas (Yeutter 1998, 63). However, by the late 1980s, Europe and the United States (US) had become export-dependent as a result of increased production, rising stockpiles, and corporate interests seeking to expand their markets. Consequently, when the Uruguay Round opened in 1986, liberalization of agricultural trade was the rallying cry of the European Union (EU), the US, and the newly formed Cairns Group. However, major differences between the US and EU positions on agricultural trade effectively stalled the talks for years. In November 1992 the EU and the US resolved their differences with the signing of the Blair House Accord, which then quickly led to the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA).
The three pillars of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture are market access, export competition, and domestic support. The aims of the agreement are threefold: 1) to increase market access by reducing tariffs (by 36 per cent and a minimum of 15 per cent for developed countries and by 24 per cent and a minimum of 10 per cent for developing countries) and imposing an import food requirement of 3-5 per cent and 1-4 per cent of national consumption for developed and developing countries respectively; 2) to increase market access by reducing export subsidies by 36 per cent in developed countries and 24 per cent in developing countries; and, 3) to reduce domestic support by reducing direct and indirect government supports (measured by the Aggregate Measure of Support (AMS)) by 20 per cent and 13.3 per cent in developed and developing countries respectively. These new trade regulations were to have far-reaching implications for domestic food and agriculture policies, food security, and farmers’ livelihoods.

The Vía Campesina: Establishing Common Ground in the North and South

Certainly, the key groups profoundly affected by the WTO and its new reach into agriculture were those who produce most of the world’s food — rural women, peasants, and small and medium-scale farmers. When the Uruguay Round started in 1986, many wondered how they would respond to the drastic changes taking place in the countryside. It was difficult to imagine how farmers in the North and South could possibly establish any common ground. However, a few years later one did not need to imagine it. In May of 1993, just one year prior to the closing of the Uruguay Round, farm leaders from around the world gathered together in Mons, Belgium, under the banner of a newly formed global peasant and farm movement, the Vía Campesina. The Vía Campesina emerged as a global movement embracing organizations of peasants, small and medium-scale farmers, rural women, farm workers, and Indigenous agrarian communities in Asia, the Americas, and Western and Eastern Europe. Africa is in the process of integrating into the organization. Since its inception, the Vía Campesina has experienced rapid expansion. Currently, 97 farm organizations, representing millions of farming families from 43 countries, now belong to the Vía Campesina.

How are we to understand the rising level and extent of agrarian activism among farm organizations in different parts of the world? What common ground do peasants and farmers in the North and South share? And what led farmers to converge into an international peasant and farm movement?

For Vía Campesina organizations, the creation of the WTO was, in many ways, simply the culmination of years of neo-liberal ideology and practices that had been implemented at the national level. For many, this was all-too-familiar ground. Numerous countries, in the South and the North, had restructured their agricultural economies as required by the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions during the 1980s and in preparation for, or as part of, regional trade agreements. Rural landscapes underwent rapid and profound change as national governments redefined agricultural policies and legislation to facilitate greater integration into an international market-driven economy. Existing agricultural and marketing structures were dismantled while new agrarian laws aimed at restructuring land tenure, land use,
and marketing systems were introduced to increase production for export, and to industrialize and further liberalize the agricultural sector. These changes emphasized “modernization” and the creation of a more “market-responsive” and “dynamic” agricultural sector.

As farm policy was increasingly transferred from the national level to regional and global levels, farm organizations sought to form international links and alliances with like-minded progressive organizations. Throughout the mid-1980s and early 1990s many farm leaders participated in bilateral exchanges and dialogue with counterparts in the North and South. This enabled them to jointly contemplate their “place” in an increasingly globalized economic, social, and political setting; develop a collective analysis of the changes taking place in the countryside worldwide; share experiences and strategies of organizing in the countryside; and discuss possible responses and collective actions. For example, the National Farmers Union in Canada strengthened ties with the National Family Farm Coalition in the US and with Mexican farm organizations — like the Union Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autonomas (UNORCA) and the Asociación Nacional de Empresas Comercializadoras de Productores del Campo (ANEC) — in a common struggle to oppose the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In some cases peasants and farmers in the North and South repositioned themselves by creating new umbrella organizations such as the Coordination Paysanne Européenne (CPE) and the Asociación de Organizaciones Campesinas Centroamericanas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo (ASOCODE) to articulate cohesive positions and mobilize collective action at a regional level.

In April 1992, representatives of eight farm organizations from Central America, the Caribbean, Europe, Canada, and the US gathered together under the framework of the second congress of the Nicaraguan Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG). Here, farmers elaborated the Managua Declaration (1992), which clearly articulated the common ground shared by farming families in the North and South:

Neoliberal policies represent a dramatic constraint on farmers throughout the world, bringing us to the brink of irredeemable extinction and further aggravating the irreparable damage which has been caused to our rural environs. . . .

We note that the GATT affects farmers in poor countries and as well impoverishes farmers in rich countries to the benefit of monopolies and transnational corporations.

Trade and international exchange should have as their fundamental goal, justice and cooperation rather than competition and the survival of the fittest.

We as producers need to be guaranteed sufficient income to cover as a minimum our costs of production. This, to date, has not been a concern of the negotiators of the GATT. We reject policies which promote low prices, liberalized markets, the export of surpluses, dumping and export subsidies.

Sustainable agricultural production is fundamental and strategic to social life and cannot be reduced to a simple question of trade. Farmers demand direct participation in the GATT negotiations (Managua Declaration 1992).
Perhaps more importantly, these farm leaders also committed themselves to further collaborate by forging links with and building unity among farm organizations from around the world in search of alternatives to the neoliberal model:

We agree on the need to continue to strengthen our ties as farmers’ organizations assured that through our unity we will find the means to have our voice and our positions heard by those who would usurp our right to cultivate the land and assure our families’ dignity.

As well, we agree on the urgent task of advancing the formulation of alternative proposals to neoliberalism which, born of our productive vocation, would guarantee economic development in accord with the participation of and respect for the majorities and the environment which feeds us (Managua Declaration 1992).

Just one year later, as follow-up to the Managua meeting, 46 farm leaders from around the world — including representatives from most of the organizations that had signed the Managua Declaration — gathered in Mons, Belgium, and formally constituted the Vía Campesina on May 16, 1993. The gathering had been orchestrated mainly by an NGO to focus on defining a comprehensive and international farmer-driven research project. Farm leaders, however, arrived at Mons with a broader and more pressing agenda. Most important, they sought to forge progressive organizations into an international peasant and farm movement to resist neoliberal agricultural policies that were destroying the livelihoods of farming families everywhere. Farm leaders defined five regions and elected a Coordinating Commission made up of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), representing South America, ASOCODE, representing Central America, the Caribbean, and North America, Peasant Solidarnosc (Poland), representing Eastern Europe, KMP (Philippines), representing Asia, and CPE (Europe), representing Western Europe.

This new international peasant and farm movement emerged in explicit rejection of neoliberal agricultural policies and as a direct response to the fact that the concerns, needs, and interests of people who actually work the land and produce the world’s food were completely excluded in the GATT negotiations on agriculture. Peasants and small-scale farmers in the North and South were determined to work together on the urgent task of developing alternatives to neoliberalism and to make their voices heard in future deliberations on agriculture and food. As the Mons Declaration stressed:

As a response to the current irrational and irresponsible logic of production and to the political decisions which support it, we propose the following basic conditions in order to bring about an agricultural development which is ecologically sustainable, socially just and which allows the producer real access to the wealth s/he generates day in [and] day out:

1. The right of small farmers to a living [in the] countryside; this implies the full right of farmers to their own autonomous organisations and the recognition of their social importance in the definition and implementation of development in general, and rural development in particular.
2. The right to a diversified agriculture which guarantees, as a matter of priority, a supply of healthy, high quality food for all peoples of the world, based on a profound respect for the environment, for a balanced society and for effective access to the land.

3. The right of every country to define its own agricultural policy according to the nation’s interest and in *concertación* [an agreement pact] with the peasant and Indigenous organizations, guaranteeing their real participation (Vía Campesina 1993a).

As the Uruguay Round of the GATT drew to a close, peasant and farm organizations clearly understood that international trade agreements would result in fundamental changes to more than the structure of agricultural economies and the social fabric of rural communities. Perhaps most disturbing, the WTO would fundamentally alter the relationship between farmer organizations and the state as the WTO’s power reached far into what had been, until then, the business of national governments — formulation of national agriculture policies. By signing international agreements, national governments and politicians could forsake domestic programs, claiming that it was all beyond their control. Their hands were tied — all policies and programs must comply with the WTO.

The WTO promised economic growth and prosperity for all — including those living in the countryside. The three pillars of the Agreement on Agriculture — market access, domestic support, and export subsidies — sought to increase trade and level the playing field so that all of the world’s producers could compete more effectively in the international marketplace. This was the theory. Liberalization and the creation of a global competitive agricultural economy were promoted as the solution to the high levels of poverty and food insecurity that had plagued rural areas for decades.

Yet, through ongoing dialogue, exchanges, and delegation visits to different countries, farm leaders learned that the lived experience of farmers around the world differed drastically. Rather than improving the well-being of peasants and small farmers, the Vía Campesina claims that globalization of an industrial model of agriculture, together with increased liberalization of the food trade, has led to an acute agricultural crisis, the destruction of bio-diversity and subsequent loss of cultural diversity, further degradation of the environment, increased consolidation and concentration of transnational corporations in the food and agriculture sector, and greater disparity and impoverishment in the countryside. It argues that neoliberal policies are sustained by human rights abuses and increased violence in the countryside — geared specifically to intimidate peasants — while economic liberalization endangers national food security and threatens the livelihood and very survival of peasant families. As a result, peasant and farm families everywhere, in the North and South, are “disappeared” and rural communities are decimated (Vía Campesina 1993a, 1993b, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1998, 1999, and 2000b). There is much evidence to support these claims.

For example, a study of 113 countries conducted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) found that between 1965 and 1988 — a time when many countries
initiated SAPs and pushed for modernization in agriculture — the “level of rural poverty (in terms of both a share of population, and absolute population size) has increased significantly” (Jazairy, Alamgir and Panuccio 1992, pp.2-3). The study stated that 97 per cent of the rural population of Bolivia (and 93.4 per cent in Honduras) lived in extreme poverty (Jazairy, Alamgir and Panuccio 1992, p.17). Also, during the period from 1960-80, a time of intense modernization in the Brazilian countryside, 29 million people migrated to the cities (Jazairy, Alamgir and Panuccio 1992, p.72).

More recent findings counter the prediction that increased liberalization will bring prosperity to the countryside. According to IFAD (2001, p.3) “[o]verall there has been no global correction since the late 1970s of the urban biases that sentence rural people to more widespread and deeper poverty, illiteracy and ill-health.” There are now 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty; 75 per cent of these people live and work in rural areas (IFAD 2001, pp.15-16). Evidence shows that since the 1980s a number of transitional countries have experienced sharp rises in rural poverty (IFAD 2001, p.3); throughout the 1990s, aid to agriculture fell by two-thirds; and, during the past three years, rural poverty increased by 10-20 per cent in a number of Latin American countries (Gonzalez 2000, p.2).

In a study that examined the links between the AoA and food security in 14 developing countries in 2000, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) observed “... a general trend toward the consolidation of farms as competitive pressure began to build up following trade liberalization.”6 With few, if any, safety nets in place, this led to increased displacement and marginalization of farming peoples. Of the countries studied, only a few demonstrated improvements in food exports while the majority experienced sharp increases in food imports. For instance, in comparing the value of food imports between 1990-94 and 1995-98, India’s imports grew by 168.4 per cent, Brazil’s by 106.7 per cent, and Peru’s by 57.3 per cent, according to the FAO study. This influx of cheap imports undermined the ability of small producers to compete. In countries, like India, where over 78 per cent of the population’s livelihood depended on agriculture, this was a recipe for disaster. While India has experienced economic growth since it embarked on the path to liberalization in 1991, poverty has not declined.

Mexico is perhaps one of the best examples of agricultural economic liberalization: it now boasts eight free trade agreements encompassing 24 countries in three continents (El Financiero, 2000). Those with the most devastating impact on the Mexican peasantry are the agriculture provisions in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that came into effect in January 1994. Once self-sufficient in basic grains, Mexico is becoming increasingly import-dependent. Between 1992 and 1996, food imports rose from 20 per cent to 43 per cent of total internal consumption, and rice imports, one of Mexico’s basic grains, went from half a million tonnes to seven million tonnes (Third World Resurgence 1996b, pp. 20-30). By 1999, 25 per cent of beans and 97 per cent of soy were imported (Comision de Agricultura 2000, p.181). Liberalization included the dismantling of guaranteed prices for producers and a substantial reduction in subsidized inputs. Increased food imports at prices peasants, struggling with the collapse of these support programs, could not match, led to farmers being pushed off the land and increasing poverty. For example, high levels of corn imports have led to a 45 per cent drop in price paid to
farmers (Nadal 2000, p.36); between 1993-98 wheat prices paid to farmers fell by 32 per cent and beans by 51 per cent (Public Citizen 2001, p.15).

Heightened levels of poverty and the abandonment of basic food subsidies have led to decreased food consumption. While corn prices have fallen, the cost of tortillas has increased by 179 per cent (Nadal 2000, p.36). As Victor Suarez, coordinator of the Asociación Nacional de Empresas Comercializadoras de Productores del Campo (ANEC), and member of the Vía Campesina claims: “Eating more cheaply on imports is not eating at all for the poor in Mexico. . . . One out of every two peasants is not getting enough to eat. In the 18 months since NAFTA, the intake of food has dropped by 29%” (Quoted in Third World Resurgence 1996b, p.30). Since many of the farm and food support programs have all but disappeared or have faced severe cutbacks as part of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) and liberalization, millions of peasant farmers have been further impoverished and forced to migrate in search of employment.

Alberto Gomez, Executive Coordinator of the UNORCA in Mexico, describes the common ground shared by peasants and farmers in the North and South as follows:

Globalization is affecting us in distinct ways, our lives and our patrimony. Globalization is a global offensive against the countryside, it is a global offensive against small producers and family farmers that are not in the logic of an “efficient” countryside, an industrialized countryside. It is a global advancement against peasants’ and small producers’ visions for resource management, conservation of biodiversity and all of these issues. . . . We are all facing the same enemies in this globalization. And, all of these have names and last names, they are the big companies, the transnationals. So, there are different circumstances but we are facing the same global tendency driven by the governments of the richest countries for the benefit of the large transnationals (Personal interview, 2000).

As Alberto Gomez confirms, it is not just farming people in the South that are feeling the brunt of trade liberalization in agriculture. Every two minutes one farm in the European Union is “disappeared” (CPE 1995). Since 1978 half of the farming population in France and Germany has left agriculture. In the OECD countries the number of farms is falling at a rate of 1.5 per cent per year, and only 8 per cent of the labour force now works in agriculture (The Economist, March 25, 2000, p.6). In the United States, according to Mittal and Kawaai (2001, p.4), “in the years between 1994 to 1996, about 25% of all US hog farmers, 10% of all grain farmers, and 10% of all dairy farmers went out of business.” The US Department of Labor predicts a continuing decline in rural America; over the next 10 years, over 270,000 farmers will lose their jobs (NFU-US 2002). And, while American farmers’ net income in 2002 is expected to decline by 20 per cent, Cargill, Inc. is experiencing a 51 per cent increase in profits (NFU-US 2002).

Canadian farmers are also among the world’s most “competitive” and “efficient” producers, yet many are forced off the land because farming is no longer economically viable. As Darrin Qualman, Executive Secretary of the NFU, explains:

“The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!”
Since 1988 — the year Canada signed the Canada-U.S. Trade Agreement — Canadian agri-food exports have nearly tripled. Canadian farmers and exporters have been very successful in increasing exports, in gaining “market access.” The result, however, has not been the farm prosperity that politicians, economists, and trade negotiators predicted. Since 1988, net farm income has remained stagnant — or fallen dramatically if inflation is taken into account (Qualman 2002, pp.1-3).

Falling farm incomes lead to rural depopulation: whole communities are abandoned. Between 1998 and 2001, the number of people working in agriculture in Canada declined by 26.4 per cent, while in some provinces the figure was much higher: Alberta saw a 37.6 per cent decline, Saskatchewan a decline of 36.2 per cent, and Ontario a decline of 31.5 per cent (Lang 2002, p.3). As Nettie Wiebe, former president of the NFU, said:

> It is worth noting that the Canadian government has adhered diligently to the WTO rules by withdrawing agriculture supports, deregulating and privatizing the infrastructure such as transportation and inspection. Canadian farmers are the ‘poster boys’ of the WTO, rigorously following the prescriptions to invest, industrialize, maximize production and focus on exports. For that we are rewarded with record losses of income, people and communities. If we’re the ‘winners’ in the WTO game, what must the losers be experiencing? (Personal interview, 2002)

The extent of the agricultural crisis is perhaps best captured by the tragic suicide of over 400 farmers that occurred in the 1997-98 agricultural season in the districts bordering the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. These suicides clearly demonstrate the extreme difficulties farmers face as they shift from the more low-cost, low-risk growing of traditional basic grains to a high-cost, high-risk model of production for the market in a context where there is little (if any) institutional support. The socio-economic profile of the farmers who committed suicide reveals that most were involved in commercial market-oriented agriculture. These farmers were doing exactly what current agricultural policy advocated — they were embarking on the prescribed path to modernization and liberalization. Yet, their lives ended in desperation and tragedy.

Peasant and farm families have not, however, been compliant accomplices during this process of economic restructuring, nor have they been passive victims in the face of increasing poverty and marginalization. Economic liberalization and the globalization of an industrialized model of agriculture spurred farm and peasant leaders in the North and South to mobilize far beyond national borders and reach across continents. Indeed, in forming the Vía Campesina, progressive farm and peasant organizations effectively “transnationalized” and began carving new spaces for negotiation and collective action. As Paul Nicholson, a Vía Campesina leader from the Basque Country, explained at the Second International Conference of the Vía Campesina in 1996:

> To date, in all the global debates on agrarian policy, the peasant movement has been absent; we have not had a voice. The main reason for the very existence of the Vía Campesina is to be that voice and to speak out for the creation of a more
just society. . . What is involved here is [a threat to] our regional identity and our traditions around food and our own regional economy. . . As those responsible for taking care of the nature and life, we have a fundamental role to play. . . The Vía Campesina must defend the peasant way of rural peoples. . . We must defend a ‘peasant model’ and present it to international bodies. We had our first conference three years ago. There were less than half of us at that conference and we did not know exactly what we were undertaking. But we followed our intuition, we knew we had common interests, and we knew the only way to confront the current political process was to join forces and express a unified voice (Vía Campesina 1996c, p.10).

According to the Vía Campesina, the conflict is not between farmers in the North and peasants in the South. Rather, resistance to the WTO must be seen as a struggle over two competing — and in many ways diametrically opposed — models of social and economic development. On the one hand: a globalized, neoliberal, corporate-driven model where agriculture is seen exclusively as a profit-making venture and productive resources are increasingly concentrated in the hands of agro-industry. The Vía Campesina, on the other hand, envisions a very different, more humane, rural world: one based on a “rediscovered ethic of development” stemming from the “productive culture” and “productive vocation” of farming families (Managua Declaration 1992). Here, agriculture is farmer-driven, based on peasant production, and it plays an important social function while at the same time being economically viable and ecologically sustainable. The encroachment of the WTO into agriculture and food was met with the growing resistance of farmers organized at the international level, who demanded food sovereignty, the right to food, and the right to produce. As the Vía Campesina declared during its Third International Conference (held in Bangalore, India):

The imposition of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and regional trade agreements are destroying our livelihoods, our cultures and the natural environment. We cannot, and we will not, tolerate the injustice and destruction these policies are causing. Our struggle is historic, dynamic and uncompromising.

The Vía Campesina will continue to struggle for justice with mobilizations and actions all over the world from the streets of Seattle to the hillsides of Peru. We are committed to using the most effective, non-violent strategies available, ranging from refusing to participate and direct action to negotiations (2000b).

**WTO Spurs Worldwide Agrarian Activism**

Just seven months after the Vía Campesina was created, Vía Campesina leaders joined over 5,000 protestors — including European, Indian, Japanese, Latin American, American, and Canadian farmers — to march on the GATT in the streets of Geneva on December 3, 1993. They called for an alternative trade agreement that put the needs of people ahead of profits (Choplin 2001). Addressing the rally, Nettie Wiebe, then Women’s President of the National Farmers
Union of Canada (NFU), one of the founding organizations of the newly formed farm and peasant movement, declared:

It is unthinkable that decisions which will have important consequences for all of us be made hastily and in relative secrecy with so little input from those whose livelihoods and lives are at stake. As Canadian farmers we are particularly concerned that an international trade agreement must not be used to destroy the food production capacity and food self-reliance mechanisms within countries. Our experience of ordering production domestically to achieve self-reliance and a fair price to farmers in egg, poultry and dairy production without distorting international trade is successful. It could serve as a model for others. A GATT agreement should not destroy such systems. After all, the real reason to produce food is surely not to increase trade and augment the profits of multinational traders, but rather to feed people (Quoted in Pugh 1994).

The Vía Campesina (1993b) captured the increasing frustration of farming families in demanding the democratization of world trade talks and urging “governments to negotiate a fair international trade order which pays fair prices, does not destroy family farming and leaves each region with the possibility of securing its own food supply.”

At the Second WTO Ministerial Conference, held in May 1998, Via Campesina leaders returned to Geneva — this time joining a growing crowd of over 10,000 demonstrators (Vuffray 2002). After the first three years of implementation, the WTO agreements had failed to bring any of their promised benefits to the countryside. Indeed, Vía Campesina organizations had experienced a deterioration in the social fabric of rural communities, accompanied by a decline in farm income as national governments altered and/or abandoned programs and institutions to comply with WTO rules. The encroaching power of the multilateral institution and the acquiescence of nation-states were clearly captured by President Clinton, who, in addressing the Ministerial Conference, declared that “Globalization is not a policy choice — it is a fact.” (Quoted in Madeley 1999, p.17)

The thousands of people marching in the streets of Geneva, many of whom had contributed to the successful debacle of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment — adamantly rejected this laissez-faire attitude toward globalization and liberalization. While some of them, namely the Peoples’ Global Action (PGA), clamoured for the abolition of the WTO, the Vía Campesina demanded a stop to the agricultural negotiations, that agriculture and food be taken out of the WTO, and that a comprehensive audit be carried out to analyze the impact that the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) were having on food security, food sovereignty, the environment, and the livelihoods of farming families everywhere. While demonstrating in the streets of Geneva the Vía Campesina may well have been the only social actor to stress the need to reclaim agriculture in this way. This reflects the significantly different “place” and, hence, unique perspective of food producers organized in the Vía Campesina; for unlike many other social actors, their very survival and livelihoods depend on fundamental, farmer-led changes in the production, marketing, and trade of food. According to the Vía Campesina (1998, p.1) “[i]nternational trade must serve society” and the current rules and structure of global food trade were designed
primarily “to shift control over a basic human right [such as food] out of the hands of people and their governments” to better serve the interests and bottom line of agro-industry (Vía Campesina 1998). The Vía Campesina went on to argue:

The loss of national food sovereignty within the WTO system is dangerous and unacceptable. Vía Campesina strongly objects to the conduct of negotiations in agriculture under the terms of the World Trade Organization. . . . The agreements are defined by big industrialised countries . . . and multinational corporations with little participation of other countries and social movements. These entities are acting without…responsibility or accountability thereby degrading both people and natural resources (Vía Campesina 1998).

Two years later at the Third Ministerial Conference, resistance had escalated dramatically. Tens of thousands of protestors representing a wide range of social actors, including environmentalists, labour, Indigenous groups, students, church groups, and women’s organizations, took to the streets in Seattle. Once again, farmers were at the forefront of resistance to the corporatization and globalization of agriculture. Vía Campesina leaders demonstrated in front of a downtown McDonald’s and at the offices of Cargill in Seattle, and joined labour leaders at the head of a 50,000-strong peaceful demonstration against the WTO (Nicholson 2002). By this time, the Vía Campesina was convinced that the WTO was incapable of reform and sought to delegitimize it as an institution responsible for agricultural trade by reiterating demands that agriculture and food be taken out of the WTO and that food sovereignty be respected (Vía Campesina 1999).

Protest in the streets — “the Battle of Seattle” as the media called it — together with increasing internal opposition by some developing countries, contributed to the WTO’s failure to launch the Millennium Round. This called into question the future legitimacy of the WTO. As The Economist reported:

The fiasco . . . dealt a huge blow to the World Trade Organization and to prospects for freer trade. The WTO’s credibility is lower than it has ever been. . . . The Seattle summit has also raised doubts about whether the WTO’s unwieldy structure and arcane procedures can cope with 135 member-countries all demanding their say (December 11, 1999, p.17).

The setback to the WTO’s legitimacy was seen as a resounding victory for many social justice movements around the world. The WTO could no longer ignore the rising voices of dissent that were coalescing into growing, well-organized, visible, and vocal civil society movements. Power had shifted, if only slightly, as globalization from above was now effectively being countered by a new international force: globalization from below. 10 As The Economist reported:

The debacle in Seattle was a setback for freer trade and a boost for critics of globalization. . . . The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that descended on Seattle were a model of everything the trade negotiators were not. They were well organised. They built unusual coalitions (environmentalists and labour groups, for instance, bridged old gulfs to jeer the WTO together). They had a clear agenda —
to derail the talks. And they were masterly users of the media. . . . In short, citizens’ groups are increasingly powerful at the corporate, national and international level (December 11, 1999, p.18).

By the Fourth Ministerial Conference, proponents of liberalization were desperate to get the WTO back on its feet. The lengths to which the WTO was prepared to go are perhaps best reflected in the fact that, while world leaders agreed to postpone the World Food Summit: Five Years Later (originally scheduled to take place just days before the Doha talks) because of security risks following the September 11th terrorists attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City, they refused to delay the trade talks. Negotiations took place in a heavily militarized, fortress-like conference site. (This, of course, is a sad commentary on the priorities and morals of government leaders: focusing on increasing trade over solving hunger and poverty.)

Holding the WTO conference in Doha, Qatar, a monarchy where little public demonstration or civil disobedience would be tolerated, helped to ensure the smooth running of the Conference by severely restricting on-site opposition from civil society organizations (CSOs). The WTO Secretariat and the Qatari government, claiming a severe lack of lodging facilities in Doha, authorized the entry of a limited number of NGOs into the country. A total of 400 NGOs and business representatives participated in the official meetings (Blustein 2001b); only 60 of these were “genuine” organizations, in that they were not controlled by government or business interests (Bello 2001b). Hence, the WTO did succeed in greatly limiting the presence and actions of CSOs in Doha. By reshaping the nature of permitted civil society opinion in this way, the WTO then attempted to interpret the world according to its self-limiting perspective. Commenting on CSO involvement in Doha, the Director General of the WTO, Mike Moore, claimed, “I think we’re getting more support from NGOs,” because the majority of NGOs focused on lobbying (rather than protesting) by working on or with national delegations (Quoted in Pruzin 2002).

However, opposition was not completely co-opted nor silenced. The 60 representatives of more action-oriented and critical CSOs who made it to Doha engaged in daily protest, and they kept the rest of the world informed by sending daily reports on the process of deliberations in Doha. Perhaps more importantly, the WTO was powerless to stop the hundreds of thousands of people from taking to the streets around the world in their respective countries to resist the launching of a new round of trade negotiations. Although this was not covered in many of the Northern media sources, civil society organizations participated in teach-ins, rallies, parades, and public actions in over 60 cities in — among other countries — Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Honduras, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, the Philippines, Russia, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, and Turkey (Vía Campesina 2001). Once again, farm and peasant organizations belonging to the Vía Campesina actively participated in many of these protest events.

Of course, farmers’ protests against liberalization of agriculture are not limited to the WTO Ministerial Conferences. Agrarian resistance is often expressed at the more local or national level and, in some cases, farmers’ organizations are at the forefront of national struggles against
The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!

liberalization. Take, for example, the several thousands of Taiwanese farmers who, when faced with the impending opening of their markets to US pork and poultry, threw pig manure at US government offices in Taiwan (WTO News 1998, p.1). More recently, violence broke out as thousands of farmers in South Korea participated in anti-WTO protests (Agence France Press 2001b). And who can predict how the millions of Chinese farmers will react to the falling prices and unpaid wages they are now just beginning to experience only two months after China joined the WTO? (O’Neill 2002) Then there is the widely publicized case of José Bové, a leader of the Confédération Paysanne, being charged for the dismantling of a McDonald’s and the denaturation of Novartis genetically modified seeds in France (Bové and Dufour 2000).

Within the Vía Campesina, however, the transnational dimension of local and national resistance is perhaps best reflected in the struggle against the imposition of genetically modified seeds. From the Karnataka State Farmers Association’s (KRRS) destruction of Bt-cotton fields in India, to the Movimiento Sem Terra’s (MST) blocking of Argentinean ships carrying genetically modified seed to Brazil, to the Canadian NFU’s work against the introduction of GMO wheat, peasants and farmers are clearly refusing to give transnationals control over seeds.

Perhaps the earliest and certainly the largest displays of farmer opposition to the GATT have taken place in India. Every year the Karnataka State Farmers Association (KRRS), currently a regional coordinator of the Vía Campesina, organizes massive rallies on Gandhi’s birth date (October 2). In 1991, over 200,000 farmers gathered to protest the liberalization agenda contained in the Dunkel Draft of the Uruguay Round. Just one year later the crowd had grown considerably; over half a million Indian farmers gathered in Bangalore to launch the Seed Satyagraha.13 The KRRS repeatedly called on the Government of India to reject the Dunkel Draft Treaty and TRIPS. Given the cultural significance of seeds in Indian agrarian communities, TRIPS was of great concern because it effectively threatened to transfer the ownership and control of seeds away from farmers and into the hands of transnational corporations. In the interest of protecting the autonomy of small farmers, the KRRS articulated the following demands, among others: Decisions regarding the Dunkel Draft Treaty could not be made in the absence of public debate, including consultations with farmers’ organizations and all state legislatures; farmers have the right to produce, save and sell seeds; governments must oppose the patenting of intellectual property rights on living organisms; and transnational seed companies must not be allowed entry into India (Assadi 1995, p.194).

By 1993, opposition to liberalization had gained momentum as the KRRS joined other key peasant organizations, like the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, in a massive all-India rally on March 3, 1993, in Delhi (Assadi 1995, p.194).

The Central Government of India largely ignored the KRRS’s demands, thus forcing farmers to engage in direct action. On December 29, 1992, after having served “Quit India” notices to a number of multinationals, KRRS members raided the offices and torched documents belonging to Cargill Seeds India (Nanjundaswamy 2000). Seven months later another Cargill office was attacked in Bellary. Subsequently, the direct actions of Indian farmers gained international recognition when they targeted other multinationals that were trying to establish themselves in India. In 1996, the KRRS engaged in a public awareness campaign that linked health and food safety concerns to the encroaching presence of transnational corporations in food production in

“The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!” 13
India and resulted in the ransacking of the Kentucky Fried outlet in Bangalore (Nanjundaswamy 2000). More recently the KRRS initiated its Operation Cremation Monsanto, involving the burning of Monsanto Bt cotton plants in different parts of Karnataka (The Times of India News Service 1998; The Hindu 2001).

In examining the actions and strategies of the KRRS three important points should be highlighted. First, Indian farmers, most of whom were illiterate, rapidly understood the immediate social, cultural, and economic ramifications of the decisions that were being made half a world away in Geneva. Indian farmers have clearly understood that the WTO agreements would greatly benefit the agri-food transnationals and seed companies while usurping peasant autonomy, destroying livelihoods and displacing millions of small Indian farmers (Nanjundaswamy 2000). In a country where 70 per cent of the population is rural, this is a human tragedy on an immense scale and an issue of national security. Second, farmers have engaged in a variety of actions that successfully captured the public’s attention, thus effectively putting the WTO, and India’s role and position within it, up for public debate (Prakash 2000). Third, although the KRRS may not have seen any immediate results from their actions, they did succeed in educating the public (and government officials for that matter) and mobilizing different sectors to action; in so doing, they may well have helped to shift public opinion to some degree (Nanjundaswamy 2000). For example, it is not uncommon to hear former government officials — such as V.P. Singh (India’s former Prime Minister) and S.P. Shukla (India’s former Ambassador to GATT) — now openly criticize the WTO as well as India’s lack of leadership in challenging the multilateral institution (Frontline 2001; Shukla 2001). This is a remarkable achievement and may help explain the more prominent and less reticent role that Indian negotiators took at the Fourth Ministerial Conference in Doha. Indeed, India’s actions almost provoked the collapse of the talks.

The Power Behind the WTO

When the Vía Campesina entered the global scene in 1993, the international space, of course, was not empty. Indeed, it was largely dominated by business. No one can deny the prominent role that the business community played in pushing for the Uruguay Round and ultimately reshaping the international trade regime with the creation of the WTO (Bello 2000, p.1; Scholte 2001, p.4). Corporate interests, largely represented by transnational corporations, continue to be an active and dominant force in the current trade negotiations (O’Brien, Goetz, Scholte and Williams 2000; Stichele 1998, Ritchie 1996; OXFAM International 2002; Murphy 2002).

There are two main ways that transnational corporations influence international agricultural trade deliberations. First, as many have said, it is transnational corporations that trade, and not governments (Oloka-Onyango and Udagama 1999). The fact that transnational corporations control the great majority of the world’s agricultural trade gives them overwhelming market power. This market power is enhanced further through a combination of corporate strategies, including horizontal and vertical integration, consolidation and concentration, production and marketing contracts, and globalization (Heffernan and Constance 1994; Heffernan 1998 and 1999). Liberalization of agricultural trade, combined with the TRIPS, spurred waves of
mergers and acquisitions throughout the 1990s among agrochemical, seed, and pharmaceutical companies, agri-food corporations, and food retailers.\textsuperscript{17}

These strategies facilitated the globalization of an industrialized model of agriculture with agri-business corporations “value-adding” their way to a greater market share of the consumer food dollar by gaining increasing control over most stages of the food chain — including provision of inputs, food processing, transportation, and marketing. The successful pursuits of transnational corporations — which flourished in the fertile liberalized environment created by governments through the WTO — have led to oligopolistic structures and what economists, in their own unique, sanitized language call “imperfect” markets (Fulton, Larue and Veeman 1999), which in turn lead to market failures for farmers. Essentially, liberalization has enabled a small group of transnational corporations to extend their reach around the world. They are now better positioned to determine what food is produced where, by whom and at what price (Ritchie 1996; Lehman and Krebs 1996).

The second way in which transnational corporations influence international agricultural trade deliberations is by matching their market power with considerable political power.\textsuperscript{18} For example, in the United States — one of the most powerful players in the WTO — the business community has direct links to US trade negotiators through their Washington-based lobbyists and their prominent representation at the Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations (Korten 1995, pp.177-181; Clarke 1996, p.301). In addition, corporate interests are especially well represented in the official trade delegations. Take the case of the official Canadian delegation members to the Fourth Ministerial Conference in Doha. In examining closely the seven non-government advisors, it is clear that the interests of agri-industry (meat packers and processors, oilseed crushers, manufacturers, grain companies, and malting companies) and international trade lawyers were overwhelmingly represented.\textsuperscript{19}

Among the agri-food multinationals, the case of Cargill is illustrative of the influence that corporate interests exercise in international trade negotiations. William Pearce, a Vice-President of Cargill, served as President Nixon’s trade advisor. Daniel Amstutz, another Cargill executive, is recognized as having essentially written the Reagan Administration’s proposal to the GATT in 1987 and was subsequently hired as the US Government Chief Negotiator on Agriculture. Also, Cargill’s President and CEO was on the GATT Advisory Committee to the US Government throughout the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton Administrations (Ritchie 1996, p.41; Kneen 1995, p.69).

Finally, a breakdown of the type of organizations that participated at the four different WTO Ministerial meetings is also illuminating. Sixty-five per cent of non-governmental organizations that received accreditation to the first WTO Ministerial Conference held in Singapore represented business interests (Scholte, O’Brien and Williams 1998, p.17). The significant presence of commercial interests at the WTO is confirmed further when examining the long list of corporate lobbyists, Chambers of Commerce, technical trade advisory committees, insurance companies, and industry groups (among others) who attended the WTO Ministerial meetings in Geneva, Seattle, and Doha. However, this provides only a superficial view of the role and enormous influence of transnational corporations in trade negotiations. In recognition of the fact that transnational corporations are the driving force behind globalization, the UN Sub-
Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights recently established a Working Group on Transnational Corporations to investigate and monitor the role of transnational corporations in globalization and human rights abuses (Oloka-Onyango and Deepika Udagama 2000).

**Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the WTO**

In a recent publication examining the motivations for and interactions between multilateral economic institutions like the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO and global social movements, authors O’Brien, Goetz, Scholte and Williams (2000, p.224) argue that there is a “distinct” section of global social movements that demonstrates an “inclination and the ability to engage multilateral economic institutions on an ongoing basis.” Furthermore, the study explained that as multilateral economic institutions:

... cultivate a social movement constituency... the GSM [Global Social Movement] community is likely to show increasing signs of fragmentation and polarisation. The lines of division between sections of GSMs within the m loop and those outside it are becoming increasing clear. The factors that determine who is in and who is out can vary according to ideology, location, expertise and influence (O’Brien, Goetz, Scholte and Williams 2000).

According to the study, those who gained and maintained access to the WTO were those who were more ideologically inclined to accept the basic premise of globalization (although they perhaps disagreed with the scope, speed, and intensity of liberalization). This confirms the findings of an earlier study entitled “The WTO and Civil Society,” which found that conformist or reformist views were more likely to be accepted within the WTO while most grassroots social movements with more critical views had little if any access (Scholte, O’Brien and Williams 1998). Being close to the centres of power (Geneva and Washington) also facilitated greater access and engagement, as did having influence in the political system of powerful states like the European Union or the United States. As the authors point out:

The degree to which a movement can put pressure upon key states and the degree to which its concerns can be accommodated without challenging the most powerful interests are key to determining its relationship with MEIs [multilateral economic institutions] (Scholte, O’Brien and Williams 1998, p.225).

Finally, multilateral economic institutions were more apt to engage in dialogue with social movements that “speak the same language” as the multilateral agencies, that is, those who understand economics and trade law or have expertise that the multilateral economic institution lacks (Scholte, O’Brien and Williams 1998, p.224). The framework presented by O’Brien et al. (2000) provides a useful guide to explore the concrete experiences of civil society organizations working on issues of agriculture and food security and their interactions with the WTO.
More Than One Farmer’s Voice: Empowering an International Peasant Voice

When the Uruguay Round kicked off in the resort of Punta del Este in 1986 the international farm voice was dominated by the only international farmer’s organization existing at the time, the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP). IFAP, founded in 1946, was established primarily to help prevent food shortages like those resulting from the depression in the 1930s and World War II. According to its constitution the IFAP aims to:

secure the fullest cooperation between organizations of agricultural primary producers in meeting the optimum nutritional and consumptive requirements of the peoples of the world and in improving the economic and social status of all who live by and on the land.

To reach these goals, one of IFAP’s key strategies is participation. By promoting itself as the organization of “world’s farmers” IFAP has succeeded in carving a space for itself in a significant number of international institutions. For example, IFAP has Category I consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations and actively participates in consultations with a number of institutions such as — among others — the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank (WB), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and now the WTO (Karl 1996, p.131).

With a membership totaling 85 national organizations from 60 countries (30 of which are developing countries) IFAP works hard to promote the interests of its membership. It seeks unity among farmers by focusing on commonalities rather than differences. Reaching a unified position on trade, however, was a difficult task. There was “heated debate” about this during the IFAP World Farmers Congress in November 1997 in Buenos Aires. As Lee Swenson, President of the US-based National Farmers Union (a prominent IFAP organization), reported: “It is evident that farmers throughout the world oppose trade expansion because of the threat existing trade agreements present to their livelihood.” Swenson went on to caution the IFAP leadership that it was “obvious” that IFAP was “greatly divided on the trade issue, and should not pretend to be otherwise during the 1999-2000 WTO agriculture negotiations” (Quoted in McBride 1998, p.1).

Divisions in the farm community reflected what was happening on the ground at the national level. As the GATT Uruguay Round progressed, farm organizations around the world worked hard to influence the positions of their national governments. Here, divergences in positions and strategies among farm organizations became increasingly pronounced, as organizations often took a strong stance for or against agricultural liberalization. Indeed, in some countries farm organizations were at the forefront of national struggles against liberalization and globalization while others were actively working with governments to promote it. For example, in India, the KRRS’s demonstrations against the WTO were countered by the Shetkari Sangathana, who saw liberalization as an effective way to move Indian farmers out of poverty (Brass 1995; Economic Times, July 11, 2000). In Canada, the NFU’s position on trade is completely rejected by many...
of the agricultural commodity groups and the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association. In Europe the Coordination Paysanne Européenne’s calls for food sovereignty are countered with the pro-liberalization stance of the Comité des Organisations Professionnelles Agricoles de l’Union Européenne (COPA) and the Comité Général de la Coopération Agricole de l’Union Européenne (COGECA).

These national divergences were subsequently catapulted into the international arena with the emergence of the Vía Campesina. Despite IFAP’s desire, attempts, and claims to be the world farmers’ voice, numerous peasant and farm organizations in the North and South did not and still do not belong to IFAP.22 Indeed, the majority of farm and peasant organizations that gathered in Mons in 1993 did not see IFAP as the legitimate voice of peasant and small-scale farmers. Many had had direct experience with IFAP organizations at the national level. Often, IFAP members were seen as those representing larger producers working in mainstream farm organizations. Some were known as “official” organizations — that is, organizations that had been created by the government and/or received a large proportion of their funding from government sources. These organizations often advocated agricultural policies — such as those of the GATT and the WTO — judged to be detrimental to peasant agriculture (Alegria 2000). The more critical peasant and farm organizations who gathered in Mons had no interest in strengthening links to an international organization they felt had diametrically opposing interests. Instead, they effectively distanced themselves from IFAP by forging progressive organizations into a newly emerging international peasant and farm movement, the Vía Campesina (Nicholson 2002).

The very existence of the Vía Campesina is clear evidence that not all farmers speak with the same voice. The Vía Campesina coalesced in the North and South around common objectives: an explicit rejection of the neoliberal model of rural development, an outright refusal to be excluded from agricultural policy development, and a firm determination to work together to empower a peasant voice and establish an alternative model of agriculture. The Vía Campesina’s rapid growth, combined with its increasing presence and visibility, strongly suggests that IFAP was not meeting the needs and interests of many peasant and farm organizations concerned with social justice as well as economic well-being. Indeed, the Vía Campesina effectively provides an alternative to the IFAP. While both organizations embrace farming families, the Vía Campesina represents somewhat different constituencies than IFAP and is clearly articulating different positions and engaging in different strategies.

**IFAP and the Vía Campesina: Farmers’ Diverging Positions vis-à-vis the WTO**

IFAP, like the Vía Campesina, believes that international trade regulations are necessary to establish fair rules and markets for food and agriculture. However, unlike the Vía Campesina and despite Lee Swenson’s warning, IFAP ultimately took a pro-liberalization stance.23 Indeed, IFAP accepts the inevitability of liberalization and globalization of agriculture while seeking ways to ensure that farmers have the necessary tools to adapt to changing production and marketing policies. IFAP does not question the basic assumptions of the free trade model. Rather, the WTO is seen as a legitimate institution pursuing the legitimate goal of freer trade, which should:
serve to ensure that economic growth and greater integration of the world economy fulfils its potential to enhance the livelihoods of family farmers throughout the world, contributes to the eradication of poverty, and promotes an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable path for agricultural development (IFAP 1998a).

As such, IFAP positions on trade and the WTO, are essentially conformist and reformist in that IFAP seeks to make the existing model, structure, and policies work better for farmers. It then becomes a question of ensuring that farmers’ voices are heard in WTO deliberations and that WTO agreements recognize the need to slow the pace of free trade until countries from the South catch up — hence the need for transfer of technology and capacity building in the South (IFAP 1998a; 2000).

To advocate for its position, IFAP actively participates in the WTO. IFAP member organizations are often invited to be part of official national government delegations and the organization regularly meets with the WTO Secretariat and staff in Geneva (Rutherford 2002). Through this level of participation — which certainly demands a substantial level of financial and human resources — IFAP believes that it is succeeding in influencing international deliberations and ensuring that farmers’ interests are met. For example, IFAP claims that “during the Uruguay Round, IFAP’s proposal concerning the conditions of bringing agriculture under GATT’s rules and disciplines were taken up” (IFAP, n.d.). At an economic level, IFAP believes that “the contacts established with the WTO and the OECD . . . allow farmers to make progress” by helping farmers to meet the challenges of producing sufficient food for a growing world population while also dealing with increasingly volatile markets (IFAP, n.d.).

One of IFAP’s key objectives is to create and help strengthen farm organizations, especially in the developing countries, to improve farmers’ capacity and participation in national agricultural and food policy development (IFAP, n.d.; IFAP 1998b). Yet some of the farm organizations from industrialized countries that belong to IFAP have no need for such support. The American Farm Bureau Federation, for example, is one of the most influential groups in Washington and spends millions of dollars lobbying US politicians. Some of the European IFAP members are also members of the COPA (Comité des Organisations Professionnelles Agricoles de l’Union Européenne), an umbrella of mainstream European farmers’ organizations that have close links to and influence in the European Commission. Presumably, these powerful players have clout within IFAP itself. It is perhaps not so surprising, then, that the IFAP report on the Doha Ministerial ignores the questionable processes leading up to and tactics used in the Qatar gathering and essentially congratulates the WTO for succeeding in launching the so-called “Development Round” (IFAP 2001).

The Vía Campesina’s position on the WTO, on the other hand, differs significantly. It is important to understand that the Vía Campesina is not opposed to agricultural trade. However, it approaches trade from a human rights perspective rather than the exclusive market-driven approach advocated by the WTO and its proponents. The Vía Campesina insists that “food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade” (Vía Campesina 1996b). Hence, agricultural production must be geared primarily to ensuring food security under the terms of food sovereignty:

“The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!”
Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed. Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security (Vía Campesina 1996b).

Furthermore, the Vía Campesina openly rejects WTO decisions that impose:

[t]he forced liberalization of trade in agricultural products across regions and around the world [that] is resulting in disastrously low prices for many of the foods we produce. As cheap food imports flood local markets, peasant and farm families can no longer produce food for their own families and communities and are driven from the land. These unfair trade arrangements are destroying rural communities and cultures by imposing new eating patterns everywhere in the world. Local and traditional foods are being replaced by low priced, often poorer quality, imported foodstuffs. Food is a key part of culture, and the neoliberal agenda is destroying the very basis of our lives and cultures. We do not accept the hunger and displacement. We demand food sovereignty, which means the right to produce our own food (Vía Campesina 2000b).

In advocating food sovereignty the Vía Campesina explicitly rejects what is perhaps the most significant principle of the WTO Agreement of Agriculture, the “right to export” and the expanded power of the WTO in global governance over food, genetic resources, natural resources, and agricultural markets. Instead, the Vía Campesina argues that each country has the right and obligation to develop national agricultural and food policies that ensure the health and well-being of its populations, cultures, and environments.

In Seattle the Vía Campesina reiterated the demands they had voiced at the Geneva WTO Ministerial Conference:

- An immediate moratorium on further WTO negotiations.
- Immediate cancellation of the obligation to import 5% of internal consumption. Cancellation of all compulsory market access clauses.
- An evaluation of the impact of the Uruguay Round agreements and implementation of measures to correct the injustices.
- Take agriculture out of bilateral and regional trade agreements and the WTO.
- Create genuine international democratic mechanisms to regulate food trade while respecting food sovereignty in each country.
- Secure food sovereignty which means respecting each country’s right to define their own agricultural policies in order to meet their internal needs. This includes the right to prohibit imports in order to protect domestic production and to implement Agrarian Reform providing peasants and small to medium-sized producers with access to land.
- Stop all forms of dumping to protect the production of staple domestic foods.
- Prohibit biopiracy and patents on life. (Vía Campesina 1999)
For the Vía Campesina, reforming the WTO is not a viable strategy, because its very purpose, practices, and policies are so fundamentally flawed. The Vía Campesina argues that the WTO’s lack of transparency and accountability, accompanied by blatant undemocratic practices and links to agro-industry, make it a completely unsuitable international structure to be responsible for overseeing the food trade. Rather than restricting their efforts to “reforming” the WTO by negotiating what can be placed in the “green,” “blue” or “amber” box, or making slight adjustments with the creation of a ‘development’ or ‘food security’ box, the Vía Campesina argues that agriculture and food should simply be taken out of the WTO. This was clearly stated in the position of the Vía Campesina delivered in events surrounding the Ministerial meeting of the WTO in Seattle in November 1999:

A profound reform of the WTO in order to make it respond to the rights and needs of people would mean the abolition of the WTO itself! We do not believe that the WTO will allow such a profound reform. Therefore, the Vía Campesina, as an international movement responsible for the agriculture sector, demands that agriculture should be taken out of the WTO. Perhaps more appropriately, let’s take the WTO out of agriculture.

It is important to note that in 1996, the Vía Campesina appeared less able to deal with the potential power of a still out-of-reach WTO. At the time, the Vía Campesina focused on opening spaces for deliberations on food security and challenged UN agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to develop mechanisms to foster food sovereignty throughout the world. Consequently, the Vía Campesina directed its efforts and resources to participating at the World Food Summit convened by the FAO in November 1996 rather than attending the WTO Ministerial meeting in Singapore held one month later. In 2001, the Vía Campesina continued to work primarily with alternative international agencies and focused on the World Food Summit: Five Years Later, originally scheduled to take place in November, rather than on the WTO meeting in Doha. The Vía Campesina’s participation in the WTO would most certainly have contributed to legitimizing the institution’s reach into agriculture and food — something that the Vía Campesina adamantly opposed. By working within the FAO — a relatively more farmer-friendly institution than the WTO — the Vía Campesina could potentially help shift power dynamics between the FAO and other major agencies like the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. Nettie Wiebe, a member of the International Coordinating Commission of the Vía Campesina (ICC), explains this strategic decision as follows:

We are clear about the WTO: in principle this institution is pernicious for us. The FAO, in principle, is not a hostile venue for us. The UN is one of those last remaining multilateral institutions which might have some impact on its member agencies. There is within the Vía Campesina a struggle about how one should act vis-à-vis any UN operations: whether we should consign them all to having been taken over and contaminated by the WTO, or whether or not that is one of the places where there is some room to influence from one institution to another. In the end there was no conclusion that we have to abandon the FAO. It just turns out that the more it is influenced and dominated by US foreign policy and WTO overlap, the less useful it becomes (Personal interview 2002).

“The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!”
The Vía Campesina believes that new instruments must be established to develop and implement fair and socially responsible trade rules for agriculture and food and that this might best be accomplished under the auspices of a democratically run, more transparent United Nations system (Vía Campesina 1999). In this way, trade regulations would have to comply with, rather than override, international agreements such as, among others, the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on Biodiversity, and the Biosafety Protocol. Here, a brief examination of the right to food is illuminating.

The Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action adopted by Heads of States in 1996 reaffirmed the fundamental right to food for all and the obligation of each state to ensure the realization of this right. Furthermore, the human right to adequate food is recognized in Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1999). It is important to note that the Covenant recognized the right to self-determination, that is, “the right of peoples to exercise sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources,” as essential to ensuring the realization of human rights (Quoted in Oloka-Onyango and Udagama 2000, p.10). Furthermore, the ICESCR stressed that “[i]n no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence” (Quoted in Oloka-Onyango and Udagama 2000, p.10). Yet, Article XVI (4) of the Marrakesh Agreement to Establish the WTO clearly supercedes sovereignty in that all member states must alter their laws, regulations and administrative procedures to comply with WTO rules (Scholte, O’Brien and Williams 1998, p.3). Also, the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) dramatically affects the ability of national governments to define national agricultural and food policies, while at the same time forcing them to import five per cent of national consumption. What we are left with are international agreements that give full responsibility and oblige national governments to respect human rights, while at the same time all states are bound by an international trade framework that undermines their ability to act. The Vía Campesina’s calls for food sovereignty demand that trade not be the first priority. Moreover, trade policies must respect, protect, and fulfill people’s rights to sustainable production systems that yield safe and healthy food, and the WTO must function within the widely recognized limits of international human rights covenants. Since these principles would require a fundamental change in the conceptualization of the WTO, a change the WTO has given no indication it is willing to consider, the Vía Campesina demands that agriculture and food be taken out of the WTO’s jurisdiction. Or, as the Vía Campesina stated more strongly in the streets of Seattle: “Let’s take the WTO out of agriculture.”

Initially, the Vía Campesina position straddled the reformist and radical perspectives. Some Vía Campesina organizations, like the KRRS from India, clamored for the abolition of the WTO. Others, like the Canadian NFU and the Union Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autonomas (UNORCA) of Mexico, felt that an international trade regulatory system was necessary to counter the skewed power relations and conditions enshrined in regional trade agreements like NAFTA. Still others, like the Confederation Paysanne, believed that the Vía Campesina should work to reform the WTO to ensure that it complied with international human rights conventions. In the end, the Vía Campesina position was a compromise: rather than calling for the complete disbanding of the WTO as a whole, the Vía Campesina demanded a reduction in
its powers by taking agriculture out of its jurisdiction and placing it under the auspices of the UN — albeit a changed, democratic, and transparent UN.

**Farmers’ Different Strategies: Participation Versus Mobilization**

As already mentioned, participation in consultations and negotiations within multilateral agencies is an important strategy for IFAP. The Vía Campesina also engages with international institutions involved in defining agricultural and food policies. However, the Vía Campesina approaches engagement in numerous ways. In attempts to prevent or change policies and institutions that are hostile to peasants’ and small farmers’ interests, the Vía Campesina will engage in mobilization, mass demonstrations, and even direct action. Only in certain contexts where there is adequate space for negotiation will the Vía Campesina cooperate and collaborate to effect favourable policy changes (Vía Campesina 2000c). The Vía Campesina, however, stresses that negotiation must always be accompanied by mobilization (Vía Campesina 2000c).

The Vía Campesina has attracted the attention of an increasing number of international institutions — the World Bank, the FAO, the Commission for Sustainable Development, and the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), among others — who seek to legitimize their policies and programs through the “participation” of this growing international peasant movement. However, the Vía Campesina’s experience in the international arena to date has taught it some important lessons about the limitations and very real dangers of participation.

Here, the Vía Campesina’s experience with the GFAR is illuminating. The GFAR, formed in 1996, seeks to establish a global system for development-oriented agricultural research by building partnerships and strategic alliances in efforts to reduce poverty, build food security, and better manage natural and genetic resources. In a May 2000 conference held in Dresden, Germany, the GFAR brought together all key stakeholders with the goal of reaching consensus on the future direction of agricultural research. Obviously, consensus-building is a difficult and sometimes impossible process, especially when participants have diametrically opposed interests. The GFAR resolved this challenge by simply fabricating consent.

Among the participants at the GFAR conference were representatives from government departments of agriculture, national and international agricultural research institutions, NGOs, Monsanto and Novartis, the Vía Campesina, and IFAP. Most stakeholders (including IFAP), with the exception of the Vía Campesina and the NGOs, agreed with the GFAR Dresden Declaration, which reiterated a faith in science, trade, biotechnology, and genetic engineering as solutions to poverty, food insecurity, loss of biodiversity, and environmental degradation. The Vía Campesina (2000a) publicly rejected the Dresden Declaration while claiming that research should be farmer-driven and designed to meet the needs and interests of small farmers and peasants rather than remaining in the hands of agri-business. Yet, in the final hour of the conference, organizers congratulated participants for having reached agreement on the Dresden Declaration!

“The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!” 23
Following the GFAR conference, the Vía Campesina issued a press release highlighting their objections to the numerous ways that peasants and small farmers had been excluded from participating in the debate: they were not invited to speak in the plenaries, there was no translation in the small group sessions, critical themes were marginalized, and in a zealous attempt to reach consensus the Vía Campesina’s very public opposition had been conveniently ignored and purposely omitted. But, perhaps the ultimate in exclusion was the conference organizers’ insistence that in future assemblies Vía Campesina representatives were welcome to participate as “farmers” but not as representatives of the Vía Campesina. At this point the Vía Campesina opted for non-active participation, since “this condition denies and eliminates all necessary aspects of our vision, accountability and representation which are central to the Vía Campesina’s organizational activities” Vía Campesina (2000a).

Conflating IFAP and the Vía Campesina into just one space and giving them only one voice is a tactic used by most major international institutions that have invited the Vía Campesina’s participation. While IFAP appears more anxious to build consensus among all farmers by claiming that both organizations share many common concerns and are increasingly speaking the same language, Vía Campesina leaders, on the other hand, find these experiences to be of little value, disillusioning, and even disempowering. In the process of developing a joint IFAP/Vía Campesina position, often everything is reduced to the lowest common denominator — thus effectively robbing the statement of any of the Vía Campesina’s original meaning and intent (Wiebe 2001). Hence, the resulting positions no longer reflect the needs and demands of Vía Campesina organizations.

Perhaps more disturbing, this is a tactic aimed at erasing the fundamental differences between the two international farm organizations. It dilutes and silences opposition and attempts to weaken the alternatives advocated by the Vía Campesina (Verhagen 2001). For example, at the GATT demonstrations held in Geneva (on December 3, 1993) the Confédération Paysanne, accompanied by Vía Campesina leaders, met with the Director General of the GATT, Peter Sutherland (Nicholson 2002). However, the delegation had little opportunity to voice its concerns. Sutherland waved off any opposition by claiming that he had already met with farmers around the world by meeting with the IFAP, whom he claimed had supported the GATT (Wiebe 2001).  

Although the Vía Campesina did initially share the farmers’ space with IFAP in some contexts that were judged to be less significant, this is no longer the case. Now, in principle, the Vía Campesina actively resists assimilation and pressures international agencies to acknowledge that it represents distinct constituencies that have a different way of seeing the world and propose different solutions to more effectively meet their needs and interests. The Vía Campesina generally insists that it be allowed to speak on its own behalf in all spaces (Verhagen 2003). As a result, the Vía Campesina has carved a space for itself among some key international institutions which now meet with IFAP and the Vía Campesina separately. Given IFAP’s relatively uncritical (conformist/reformist) stance toward agricultural trade in the WTO, the Vía Campesina refuses to collaborate with IFAP in those crucial negotiations.

For example, in preparation for the Geneva WTO Ministerial meeting in 1998, a Vía Campesina organization, the Union de Producteurs Suisses (UPS), worked with other national organizations like the Union Suisse de Producteurs (a member of IFAP and COPA) in the hope
of presenting a joint IFAP and Vía Campesina declaration to the Director General of the WTO, Renato Ruggiero. National organizations quickly reached agreement and, with significant compromise, the statement was approved at the European level (Vuffray 2002; Nicholson 2002). The initiative, however, collapsed at the international level. Following lengthy internal deliberations that led to an increasingly critical position vis-à-vis the WTO, the Vía Campesina opted not to sign the declaration and not to meet with Ruggiero (Nicholson 2002). This was a significant decision because it clearly demarcated the field between those farm organizations working inside and outside of the WTO: on the inside was IFAP, the international farm organization that was better equipped and better situated (geographically and ideologically) to “participate”; and on the outside, the Vía Campesina, a newly established and rapidly growing international peasant and farm movement, standing its ground firmly. The Vía Campesina chose non-participation in efforts to delegitimize the WTO, influence public opinion, and mobilize collective action.

For the Vía Campesina, participation is charged with political and economic consequences. The Vía Campesina is acutely aware of how participation can be used to co-opt, thus effectively diluting or silencing opposition. More importantly, participation helps legitimize the institution with which one is cooperating, its process and policies. This is of particular concern where international institutions attempt to merge business interests, NGOs, and social movements into one “multi-stakeholder” site. As Paul Nicholson, a Vía Campesina Regional Coordinator and leader from the Basque Country, explained:

> Multilateral institutions tend to slot us all into one space — a space that we must also share with agri-business. This multi-stakeholder process is the bureaucratization of participation. It smells rotten and effectively serves to distance the base. It is not only a problem of methodology; it goes much deeper. It is a process that dilutes and ‘lightens’ the content, makes it politically correct, and ultimately renders the result useless (Personal interview 2002).

The Vía Campesina represents millions of farming families around the world and has a horizontal structure that makes decision-making an extended, time-consuming, and sometimes long-winded process (Nicholson 2002). Consultation and accountability are facilitated by a well-defined structure and process for representation and democratic decision-making. The Vía Campesina is divided into seven regions: North and Southeast Asia, South Asia, North America, Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and Western/Eastern Europe. Delegates from all regions gather together every three or four years in the Women’s Assembly and the International Conference of the Vía Campesina to determine overall direction, policies, and strategies. Regional conferences are held prior to the International Conference to ensure that the Vía Campesina’s work is grounded in local realities. A 14-member International Coordinating Commission (ICC) — with two representatives (one man and one woman) from each of its seven regions — is the most important link among the various peasant organizations. Outside of the International Conference, the ICC becomes the key decision-making and coordinating body of the Vía Campesina. All major decisions are made in consultation with the 14 members of the ICC.
However, on key issues the consultation process goes beyond the ICC because each Regional Coordinator must reflect the needs, concerns, and decisions of the organizations within his or her region. It is only through extended communication and consultation that the regional coordinators are given a regional mandate to present to the ICC. For Vía Campesina organizations, the regions are the key points of intersection between community, national, and international struggles. The ability of the Vía Campesina to be an effective force for social change in the international arena depends on strong local and national peasant organizations that work together at the regional level. And, developing effective and cohesive regions demands constant communication, coordination, open discussion, consultation, strategic planning, follow-through on commitments, and perhaps most importantly, respect for decision-making structures and processes.

The Vía Campesina would rather give up “participation” in certain international forums than compromise its commitments building a peasant and farm movement on relations of trust, respect, gender and ethnic equality, and accountability. Consequently, the organization defends its rights to define the terms and conditions under which it will participate:

The Vía Campesina must have autonomy to determine the space it will occupy with the objective of securing a large enough space to effectively influence the event. It is not acceptable to participate on the invitee’s terms in ways which subsume or erase our identity and use our credibility without giving us space to articulate our own interests and select our own representatives (Vía Campesina 2000c, p.2).

Given the importance of agriculture in the trade negotiations, it is of course in the best interests of national governments and the WTO to be seen as consulting with the world’s farmers while advancing global trade policies. Active participation at this level requires capacity, which can most easily be ensured through a substantial range of human and financial resources — something that grassroots organizations like the Vía Campesina simply do not have. For effective participation the Vía Campesina must have a sense that it has some control and influence on the ultimate outcome. Inside the WTO there is no space for the Vía Campesina; Vía Campesina positions seriously question the neo-liberal orthodoxy, and dissention is rarely, if ever, allowed on national government delegations. So, while IFAP sits at the WTO and OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) tables representing the world’s farmers, the Vía Campesina is out demonstrating in the streets in attempts to influence public opinion. Vía Campesina organizations also work to influence the positions of their national governments. Judging from the WTO’s increasingly fragile legitimacy and credibility both in government circles and with the general public, it is probably fair to say that the Vía Campesina tactics are succeeding.

The Vía Campesina and NGOs

Farming people, those organized in IFAP and in the Vía Campesina, of course, do not function in a vacuum. When the Vía Campesina surfaced, the international space was also filled by numerous international and national development NGOs, as well as research institutions working
on issues of agriculture and food security. Because these NGOs worked closely with rural organizations, they often found themselves speaking “on behalf” of and defending the interests of peasants and small-scale farmers in the international arena — even though many NGOs had not been given the mandate. However, those speaking on behalf of farmers are not always as careful as they might be to represent the views of farmers and peasants accurately. Even with the best of intentions, this type of communication often led to misrepresentation. Farming people often did not recognize their voice when it was communicated back to them. Consequently, not only did the Vía Campesina work hard to distinguish itself from IFAP, it also sought to differentiate itself from the paternalistic embrace of well-intentioned NGOs. In doing so, it forced NGOs working at the international level to come to grips with critical issues of representation, interlocution, accountability, and legitimacy.

The conflictual relations between professional NGOs and grassroots social movements working at the international level are well documented (Fox and Brown 1998; Alvarez 1998). Often, these are characterized by different goals, different ways of working, and unequal access to human, financial, and political resources that lead to skewed power relations. The same inequities apply when comparing the NGOs working on the WTO with an agrarian social movement like the Vía Campesina. NGOs working on agriculture and food security at an international level tend to be well-staffed with highly educated, experienced, multi-lingual, articulate, and mobile personnel; they understand technical language and concepts, are able to identify sources of significant funding, and have developed excellent research capacities. In comparison, while the Vía Campesina succeeds in obtaining funds to participate in key events and campaigns, core funding is virtually non-existent. With only two technical support staff, the Vía Campesina depends primarily on volunteer farm leaders who head national farm organizations that are already overstretched with work on local and national issues. These organizations are severely understaffed and suffer from a constant lack of funding.

There is also the issue of accountability. Many Vía Campesina organizations had had direct experience and were only too familiar with the existing inequities between peasant movements and NGOs working on rural issues at the national level. Also, each had significantly different ways of working. While some NGOs cultivated respectful relations with and won the collaboration of peasant organizations, others did not. Some used their association with peasant organizations to gain access to precious funds available for work in the countryside, then channeled these to pursue their own goals rather than meeting the needs of peasant organizations. Others used financial resources to co-opt peasant leaders. Still others undermined peasant organizations by bypassing the decision-making processes and structures that ensured accountability within those organizations. These same practices were then replicated at the international level.

While some NGOs clearly saw the need for and fully supported the consolidation of an independent farmer-led voice and presence in the international arena, others were reluctant to share the space they had long dominated. For example, some well-intentioned INGOs spoke of the importance of working with farmers, but farm leaders would be invited to international events only if and when funds remained after the NGO staff had been taken care of. Others fully supported farmers’ participation as long as they had full control over which farmers were selected. Some urban-based and urban-biased NGOs doubted that farm leaders were “capable
and articulate” enough to work at an international level (Wiebe 1998). Still others assumed that farmers’ interests were identical to theirs and often offered their financial support on the condition that NGOs would participate in farmers’ deliberations. The Vía Campesina could not tolerate these practices and sought to rectify the situation by establishing some ground rules.

At the World Food Summit in 1996, for example, the Vía Campesina refused to sign onto the NGO Declaration, claiming that it did not address adequately the concerns and interests of peasant families (Vía Campesina 1996d). The Vía Campesina, after lengthy consultations with farm organizations at the national, regional, and international levels, had come to Rome with a new concept, that of food sovereignty, as a solution to world hunger and poverty. Although food sovereignty was included in the title of the NGO Declaration, the statement did not elaborate the concept, nor did it explain how it could be implemented. In refusing to sign the Declaration, the Vía Campesina expressed disappointment with the limited content of the statement and its frustration with an exclusionary process (Vía Campesina 1996d).

The Vía Campesina’s forceful rejection of the NGO statement was, in many ways, a turning point for relations between the emerging peasant movement and NGOs. Through the Vía Campesina, farm leaders had carved out a space and were filling it with peasant and farm voices that were articulating a peasant agenda. The Vía Campesina not only demanded respect for this newly created space but it also desperately needed time for farmers from around the world to meet, engage in collective analysis and define common positions. Only then could the Vía Campesina move toward joint action with NGOs. In taking this approach, the Vía Campesina challenged NGOs to respect the different ways of working of grassroots social movements. The Vía Campesina was sending a clear and direct message to the NGOs who had long dominated the international arena: NGOs could no longer “speak on behalf of” peasants and farmers or as their representatives. Just as importantly, the Vía Campesina not only challenged “who” would speak, and “on whose behalf”; they also challenged “what” would be said and “how” one arrived at a collective position.

The Vía Campesina, unlike many NGOs, has well-defined constituencies, and it is accountable to the numerous peasant and farm organizations that participate in the Vía Campesina. As already mentioned, the Vía Campesina has an elaborate and carefully groomed system for accounting to and consulting with its grassroots organizations. Clearly, its representational structure and consultative processes heighten the legitimacy of the Vía Campesina as an authentic representative of peasants’ and farmers’ interests in the international arena. However, it also makes decision-making a more convoluted and time-consuming endeavour, thus often trying the patience of NGOs not encumbered by such structures who seek more immediate responses to global events.

Although Vía Campesina-NGO relations have been marked, from time to time, with conflict and tension, they are also a source of great power. The Vía Campesina, well aware of its limitations, was convinced that building alternatives to the neo-liberal agenda promoted by the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank would only occur with a cross-cultural, cross-sectoral convergence of grassroots social movements working together with the more professionalized NGOs. While the Vía Campesina’s trump cards were legitimacy, accountability, on-the-ground experience, and mass mobilization capacity, International NGOs could contribute much-needed expertise in
research lobbying, knowledge of global trends, and keen ability to source desperately needed funds for campaigns and mobilization. Consequently, the Vía Campesina pursued a closer working relationship with those NGOs that shared a similar analysis and fully embraced the unconditional participation of social movements.

Nevertheless, the imbalances and asymmetrical power relations described above make the creation and work of coalitions very challenging. It took years of working together before the Vía Campesina succeeded in building relations of trust and respect with NGOs. Also, the Vía Campesina needed to further build and consolidate itself as an international movement so that it could more confidently voice positions that accurately reflected the needs and interests of its constituency. Only then could it more easily move toward building strategic alliances with NGOs working on the WTO. In so doing, the Vía Campesina not only helped legitimize the NGO campaigns; it also provided content and direction. This helps to explain why it was only after the Seattle WTO Ministerial meeting that the Vía Campesina began to work in a concerted fashion with NGOs.

At the Geneva WTO Ministerial, for example, the Via Campesina spent most of its time in internal deliberations to define a common position on the issue of the WTO. It also worked more closely with social movements linked to the People’s Global Action than with NGOs. Following the Geneva Ministerial meeting, many of the groups that had successfully helped to defeat the MAI embarked on a year-long “No New Round: Turn Around” campaign leading up to the Seattle WTO Ministerial meeting. This campaign eventually brought together 1500 organizations from 89 countries from around the world which demanded a moratorium on further WTO negotiations, an assessment of the impact to date, and rejection of the introduction of new issues like investment and competition. While many Vía Campesina organizations participated actively in this campaign at the national level, the Vía Campesina was not fully on board at the international level.

While in Seattle, however, the Vía Campesina adopted its “globalize the struggle, globalize the hope” strategy. It forged links with a number of key NGOs and consolidated alliances with other sectors in an effort to build a worldwide movement to develop alternatives to the neo-liberal model advocated by the WTO. The Vía Campesina conscientiously focused on work with a number of key NGOs who shared common ideologies and similar visions for social change. Three months later the Vía Campesina joined those who had worked on the No New Round campaign leading up to Seattle. Together, they jointly elaborated a new strategy entitled “WTO—Shrink or Sink! The Turn Around Agenda” (Nicholson 2002).36

The WTO, recognizing the need to open space and dialogue with civil society organizations (CSOs), organized an NGO Symposium in July 2001. However, many CSOs felt that even after having made commitments in Seattle to greater transparency and democracy, the WTO was not demonstrating any measurable reform. Focus on the Global South, a Bangkok-based independent research and policy institute with staff in Geneva, prepared monthly reports on WTO negotiations and interactions.37 The articles explained in detail the secretive, non-transparent, and exclusive process and practices of the WTO leading up to the Fourth Ministerial Conference. Perhaps more disturbing was the fact that the WTO was ignoring the demands of numerous and increasingly vocal Third World countries who wanted the Doha Ministerial Conference to focus
on implementation. Instead, powerful WTO actors and the WTO Secretariat itself pushed for the launch of a comprehensive new round in Qatar. This move clearly indicated that the WTO was also ignoring the demands of over 1500 organizations from 89 countries — organizations that supported numerous developing countries’ calls for a focus on implementation rather than a defining new round.

Seeing no real possibility of reform, many CSOs felt that the WTO’s symposium with civil society was simply a public relations exercise. Consequently, CSOs working in a coalition held a press conference and launched the “Our World is Not for Sale: WTO Shrink or Sink” strategy centered on 11 demands to reduce the power and scope of the WTO, resist the launch of a new comprehensive round, and develop a sustainable, socially just, and democratically accountable trade system. The coalition’s eleven demands were:  

- No WTO expansion.
- Protect basic social rights and environmental sustainability.
- Protect basic social services and . . . the ability of governments and people to regulate in order to protect the environment, health, safety, and other public interests.
- Stop corporate patent protectionism: seeds and medicine are human needs, not commodities.
- No patents on life.
- Food is a basic human right: . . . protect genuine food sovereignty.
- No investment liberalization: the WTO Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMS) must be eliminated.
- Fair trade: . . . special and differential rights for Third World countries.
- Prioritize Social Rights and the Environment.
- Democratize decision-making.
- Dispute the dispute settlement mechanism.

Given the restrictions posed by holding the Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Doha, the Vía Campesina worked as part of a core group of the Our World is Not for Sale coalition in developing a three-pronged strategy.  

First, national and local events aimed at educating the general public and national officials would be organized to coincide with the Doha Ministerial meetings. Second, a major regional CSO forum on globalization and the WTO would take place in Beirut to bring together local and regional movements, strengthen their links to counterparts internationally and act as a civil society counterpoint to the official WTO Conference in Doha. Finally — certainly the most creative strategy — an Activist Armada would float from Al Aqaba, Jordan to Doha, Qatar, carrying 200-300 activists and a Fisherfolk Flotilla that would sail from Mumbai carrying traditional fisher people. The Vía Campesina consolidated ties with the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP) and farmers and fishers subsequently agreed to collaborate in organizing WTO actions (Nicholson 2002). All the organizations involved in the Our World is Not for Sale coalition were committed to non-violent and peaceful protest, and all those on board the boats would be required to sign a Peace Pledge, thus effectively distancing themselves from the fringe groups engaging in violent tactics.
The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York forced the coalition to abandon the flotilla plan, and thus substantially reduced the presence and actions of civil society organizations in Doha. Nevertheless, mobilization did not cease. Indeed, as mentioned earlier on, more people took to the streets in more places around the world then ever before! Resistance to the WTO has never been stronger; and positions and alternatives are now more clearly defined.

For example, only days before the Doha Conference began, the Via Campesina’s lone calls for food sovereignty and to get agriculture out of the WTO (voiced as early as the Geneva Ministerial Conference in 1998) were now being supported by numerous civil society organizations from around the world with the launching, on November 6, 2001, of the “Priority to Peoples’ Food Sovereignty — WTO out of Food and Agriculture” campaign. As the press release accompanying the statement explains:

Peoples’ food sovereignty is a call to governments to adopt policies that promote sustainable, family-farm based production rather than industry-led, high-input and export oriented production. This entails adequate prices for all farmers, supply-management, abolishment of all forms of export support, and the regulation of imports to protect domestic food production. All food products should comply with high environmental, social and health quality standards. This includes a ban on GMOs and food irradiation. Peoples’ food sovereignty also includes equitable access to land, seeds, water and other productive resources as well as a prohibition on patenting of life (Peoples’ Food Sovereignty 2001a, p.1).

The campaign stressed that, to ensure peoples’ food sovereignty, governments must act immediately to remove food and agriculture from the WTO jurisdiction and to begin working on a new multilateral framework to govern sustainable agricultural production and the food trade (Peoples’ Food Sovereignty 2001a, p.1). As the Peoples’ Food Sovereignty explained, this alternative international framework should involve:

- A reformed and strengthened United Nations committed to protecting the fundamental rights of all peoples and responsible for developing and negotiating rules for sustainable production and fair trade.

- An independent dispute settlement mechanism integrated within an international Court of Justice.

- A World Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Sovereignty to assess the impact of trade liberalization on food sovereignty and food security, and be responsible for developing proposals for change. This commission could consist of and be directed by civil society organizations and movements, elected representatives and appropriate multilateral institutions.

- An international, legally binding treaty that defines the rights of peasants and small producers to the assets, resources and legal protections required to exercise their right to produce. Such a treaty could be framed within the UN
Human Rights framework, and linked to already existing relevant UN Conventions.

- An International Convention to replace the current Agreement on Agriculture and relevant clauses of the WTO agreements. Within an international policy framework that incorporated rules on agricultural production and trade of food, this Convention would implement the concept of food sovereignty and the basic human rights of all peoples to safe and healthy food, decent and full rural employment, labour rights and protection, and a healthy, rich and diverse natural environment and incorporate rules on the production and trade of food and agriculture commodities (Peoples’ Food Sovereignty 2001b, p.7).

After the fiasco of the Seattle WTO Conference, however, another collapse in trade negotiations was simply not imaginable for proponents of liberalization. Despite internal and external resistance, the WTO Fourth Ministerial Conference in Doha concluded with a 10-page declaration. Upon returning home, some government officials were clearly jubilant that Doha was not a repeat of Seattle. For example, US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick claimed that “The members of the World Trade Organization have sent a powerful signal to the world . . . we have removed the stain of Seattle”; and Canada’s Minister of International Trade, Pierre Pettigrew stated: “We have turned the page on the Seattle failure” (Morton 2001, pp.1-2). Some, like the US and the EU, couched the successful launch of further liberalization in terms of “development” and an ongoing fight against terrorism. President Bush claimed that the WTO promises to bring:

... prosperity and development for all ... [and] sends a powerful signal that the world’s trading nations support peaceful and open exchange and reject the forces of fear and protectionism. .. Today’s decision offers fresh hope for the world’s developing nations. . . It reflects our common understanding that a new trade round can give developing countries greater access to world markets, and lift the lives of millions now living in poverty (Office of the Press Secretary 1001, 1).

Similarly, EU Farm Commissioner Fischer was jubilant with success as he declared:

Today we have kicked off a party where everyone gets a prize. Agriculture was one, but not the only key point in the end game. I do not know whether we have written trade history today. But I do know that history will remember these days in Doha, when the free world backed multilateralism by opposing isolationism, when developing and developed countries opted for trade instead of terrorism (European Union 2001, p.1).

*The Economist* insisted that the Doha deal was a “big win for poor countries” and that “contrary to much conventional wisdom, the WTO is the poor countries’ friend” (November 17, 2001, pp.65-66).

However, the winnings at Doha are not as straightforward as some claim; indeed, the process and outcomes are controversial and point to only a fragile recovery of the WTO. Even EU Trade...
Commissioner Pascal Lamy described the Doha process as “medieval” (Quoted from Bello 2001b, p.4). As The Economist explained, in Doha the WTO was “saved from the oblivion to which a failure might have condemned it,” and a deal was struck only as a result of drawn out, “tortured” negotiations that were interspersed with “last minute panics” triggered by recalcitrant India (November 17, 2001, p.65). Analysts from developing countries were more critical of what happened in Doha, the way it happened, and why. S.P. Shukla, India’s former Ambassador to the GATT and Secretary in the Commerce and Finance Ministries of the Government of India, had this to say:

What has happened in Doha is the beginning of the final assault of global capital on the economic sovereignty of the nation-states, particularly of the Third World.

. . . One of the main contradictions of the times is the WTO. It has a façade of democratic structure and rules of functioning. It is at the same time a non-transparent, non-participative, and undemocratic institution. Its very birth was occasioned by the processes and motivations characterised by those attributes. It talks of one vote for one member and decisions by prescribed majorities. It never flinches from forcing the will of the two powerful capitalist entities on the unwilling and screaming majority of Third World countries. It swears by consensus, but it reaches the consensus by suppressing or ignoring dissenting voices. It markets its predatory designs in the name of liberalisation and freer exchanges. The fundamental reason why things happened the way they happened in Doha is our failure to recognise the contradiction and seize the opportunity that the contradiction itself provides to turn it upside down (Shukla 2001, p.8).

Social movements and NGOs, including the Vía Campesina, were among the few actors to publicly challenge the WTO on the undemocratic and discriminatory process leading up to Doha and shed light on the manipulative tactics and continued lack of transparency exhibited at Ministerial meeting itself. Despite promises made to reform the very practices that precipitated the debacle in Seattle, the WTO had continued much as before. According to civil society organization representatives present in Doha, the initial drafts presented by the Chairman of the General Council and the Director General did not reflect the concerns of many developing countries, even though many had presented concrete proposals and positions. No brackets or covering letter accompanied the drafts, thus giving the impression of consensus. In addition to the Green Room practice, six “friends of the Chair” were appointed as facilitators to aid in reaching consensus on the declaration. There were no stated criteria or process of selection for these “green men” and all but one came from the “pro-new round” camp. Finally, some developing country delegates claimed that arm-twisting tactics such as threats to financial aid were used to win their support. In assessing the process and outcome of the recent WTO Ministerial Conference, the Vía Campesina joined numerous civil society organizations from around the world in denouncing the outcome of Doha as “Everything but Development,” and the legitimacy of the WTO was once again rejected:

. . . the outcome of Doha, especially the Ministerial Declaration and the work programme, does not have public legitimacy. . .
We condemn the non-transparent, discriminatory and rule-less or arbitrary methods and processes presided over by the WTO Director General and the Secretariat and directed by the major developed countries. Such behaviour and processes are particularly disgraceful for an international organization that boasts that its core principles are transparency, non-discrimination and the rule of law.

We therefore commit ourselves to raise public awareness worldwide on the disastrous implications of the Doha outcome, and the processes of shame that produced the outcome (Joint Statement of NGOs and Social Movements 2001).

As the work of the Our World is Not For Sale coalition demonstrates, resistance is becoming more organized, inclusive, sophisticated, and pro-active. Immediately following Doha the coalition gathered in Brussels to analyze the post-September 11th context and develop worldwide strategies for ongoing WTO resistance and mobilization. This time, the gathering included the active participation of mass movements like the Vía Campesina and the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP) together with the labour movement and NGOs. Concerted efforts were made to overcome existing imbalances, bridge differences, and explore effective ways to work more closely together. Despite increased security measures and the clamping down on dissent following September 11th, coalition participants agreed that resistance would continue: “We own the streets. Direct action remains a key element of our movements. They will not take the streets away from us.”

The terrain of struggle is expanding to include not only continued resistance at the international level but also more work at the local and national level. Contrary to mainstream media reports, opposition to globalization and liberalization is not restricted to only a few hundred fringe anarchists whose sole mission appears to be the destruction of property and grabbing media headlines. Movements working in coalitions are publicly distancing themselves from those who advocate violence. Peaceful opposition to the WTO has risen dramatically and there are no signs that it will subside in the near future.

As the thousands of civil society organizations and Vía Campesina representatives who gathered together in Porto Alegre in February 2002 declared: “The WTO, IMF and WB will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!”

In reality, the demands of the Vía Campesina and the growing anti-WTO movements are not as radical as they are often portrayed in the mainstream media. That is, the civil society organizations described in this article want a fundamental transformation of the exclusive market-driven agenda enshrined in the WTO to a human rights-driven set of international trade regulations. They are demanding the establishment of a democratic and transparent institution that works under the auspices of the United Nations and complies with existing human rights covenants and other international agreements that countries have worked so hard to reach during the past 30 years. Is this so radical?

Rather, it is the primacy of market forces enshrined in the WTO, and its current practices, that are radical departures from the international agreements that governments signed in the past. Many countries have only now begun to feel the full impact of the WTO on the marginalized and
the environment — and the increasingly limited capacity of national governments to carry out their obligations. This was highlighted in a recent report submitted to the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights:

The negative impact of globalization results in the violation of a plethora of rights guaranteed by the [International] Covenants [on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights]. . . . Developing States are, more often than not, compelled by the dynamics of globalization to take measures that negatively impact on the enjoyment of those rights. The result is that States cannot fulfil their international human rights obligations, even if they are desirous of improving the human rights situation in their countries. The critical question is the following: Can international economic forces that are engineered by both State and private actors be unleashed on humanity in a manner that ignores international human rights law? (Oloka-Onyango and Udagama 2000, p.10)

Let us remember that the WTO was only established eight years ago, at the height of an absolute faith in the market. While the WTO is now making greater attempts to add a social dimension (by including labour rights and the environment) some believe that approaching trade from a human rights perspective requires fundamental transformation. What is clear is that, as long as the WTO makes only superficial changes, the anti-WTO movements will continue to grow and resistance will intensify both from outside and inside the WTO. As the Barbadian Ambassador, Erskin Griffiths, recently said:

[T]he greatest threat to the survival of the multilateral trading system will not come from anti-globalization demonstrations or from the global economic slowdown but from a failure to seriously address the growing imbalances in the existing system and their adverse effects on developing countries (Quoted in Weston 2001).
## Acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANEC</td>
<td>Asociación Nacional de Empresas Comercializadoras de Productores del Campo</td>
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<td>AoA</td>
<td>WTO Agreement on Agriculture</td>
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<td>ASOCODE</td>
<td>Asociación de Organizaciones Campesinas Centroamericans para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo</td>
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<td>CFA</td>
<td>Canadian Federation of Agriculture</td>
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<td>CLOC</td>
<td>Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo</td>
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<td>COGECA</td>
<td>Comité Général de la Coopération Agricole de l’Union Européenne</td>
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<td>COPA</td>
<td>Comité des Organisations Professionnelles Agricoles de l’Union Européenne</td>
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<td>CPE</td>
<td>Coordination Paysanne Européenne</td>
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<td>CSOs</td>
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<td>EU</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<td>GATT</td>
<td>General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade</td>
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<td>GFAR</td>
<td>Global Forum on Agricultural Research</td>
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<td>GMOs</td>
<td>Genetically modified organisms</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Coordinating Commission of the Vía Campesina</td>
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<td>INGOs</td>
<td>International Non-governmental Organizations</td>
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<td>IFAD</td>
<td>International Fund for Agricultural Development</td>
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<td>IFAP</td>
<td>International Federation of Agricultural Producers</td>
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<td>KRRS</td>
<td>Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (Karnataka State Farmers’ Association)</td>
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<td>MST</td>
<td>Movimiento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Workers’ Movement)</td>
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<td>NAFTA</td>
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<td>NFU</td>
<td>National Farmers Union - Canada</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>SAPs</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Programs</td>
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<td>TRIPS</td>
<td>WTO Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights</td>
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<td>UNAG</td>
<td>Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos de Nicaragua</td>
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<td>UNORCA</td>
<td>Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autonomas</td>
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<td>UPS</td>
<td>Union de Producteurs Suisses</td>
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<td>US</td>
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<td>WFS</td>
<td>World Food Summit</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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Endnotes

1 This is the last sentence of the “Porto Alegre II: Call of Social Movements” elaborated at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre from January 31 to February 5, 2002. The Vía Campesina represented a significant force at the World Social Forum, with approximately 4,000 farmers and landless peasants participating in various events (Vía Campesina 2002).

2 The Cairns Group members are Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Fiji, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Africa, and Thailand.

3 See Desmarais (2002) for a discussion of the formation and consolidation of the Vía Campesina. The article also explores some of the main issues, strategies, and actions of the Vía Campesina.

4 Although SAPs was a term most often used to describe economic change in Southern states, some organizations like OXFAM-Canada stressed that Northern economies were undergoing similar processes through economic restructuring (OXFAM-Canada n.d.). See Qualman and Wiebe (2000) for an excellent analysis of the structural adjustment of Canadian agriculture.

5 The Managua Declaration was signed by ASOCODE, Windward Islands Farmers Association (WINFA), National Farmers Union (Canada), National Farmers Union (US), Coordination Paysanne Européenne (CPE), Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos (COAG-Spain), National Farmers Union (Norway), and the Dutch Farm Delegation (Netherlands).


7 Corn production occupies about 26 per cent of cultivated land and it is the main source of income for over 3 million farming families (Nadal 2002, 4). According to a report by Public Citizen (2001), NAFTA negotiators were fully aware that inclusion of corn in the NAFTA would have devastating impacts in the countryside. The Mexican Undersecretary of Agriculture at the time, Luis Tellez, predicted that ten years post-NAFTA, 10 million farming families would have been pushed off their land. (Public Citizen 2001, 23).


9 The following information was obtained from the Peoples’ Global Action’s (PGA) website www.agp.org. The PGA defines itself as an “instrument for co-ordination” for social movements involved in resisting globalization and building local alternatives. The PGA does not believe that lobbying is an effective tool for change; rather, it has embraced a confrontational approach consisting of non-violent direct action and civil disobedience. Since its inception in February 1997, the PGA has organized Global Days of Action that involved anti-globalization demonstrations at G8 Summits, WTO Ministerial Conferences, and meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In 1999 the PGA organized an intercontinental caravan for solidarity and resistance that brought 450 representatives of organizations of farmers, fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples, and anti-dam movements to Europe.

“The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!”
Richard Falk first coined the expressions “globalization from above” and “globalization from below” and Brecher, Childs and Cutler (1993) and Brecher, Costello and Smith (2000) used the terms in discussing the emergence and actions of transnational social movements.

The killing of a young protester at the G8 demonstration in Genoa no doubt also contributed to the FAO and the Italian government’s decision to postpone the World Food Summit.

At the Seattle Ministerial meeting, 1,300 NGO and business representatives received accreditation.

Satyagraha literally means “truth force” but generally refers to non-violent resistance. For an in-depth report on these KRRS actions see articles in Third World Resurgence (1993) and Assadi (1997).

It is interesting to note that in June 2000 Monsanto closed its Research and Development in Bioinformatics at the Indian Institute of Science based in India (Balasubramanyam 2000).

There are many interpretations of the concept of civil society. Many claim that “civil society organizations” (CSOs) refers only to the non-profit sector, involving only those lying outside of the state and the market. However, the WTO and its members ascribe to a much broader definition of civil society organizations which includes business interests. Although this study centres on farm organizations and non-profit NGOs, it cannot ignore the tremendous power and influence of corporate interests in the WTO.

For in-depth discussions of these processes see Goodman and Watts (1997), Goodman and Redclift (1991), ETC Group (2001), and NFU (2000).

According to the Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (the ETC Group) (2001, 1) the largest 10 pharmaceutical companies now control approximately 48 per cent of the world market; 10 agrochemical corporations control 84 per cent; the top 10 veterinary pharmaceutical companies control 60 per cent; 10 seed firms control 30 per cent; and one company sells the seeds that cover 94 per cent of the land planted with genetically modified crops in 2000.

The conventional model of agriculture was politically engineered; it evolved as a result of very close links between business interests and state support in the form of extensive research and development and favourable policies that facilitated the growth and expansion of corporate interests (Goodman and Redclift 1991). These links were clearly visible when the industrial model of agriculture, rather than an ecological approach, was exported around the world through the Green Revolution as international development institutions and governments wholeheartedly promoted the model. Also, the history of international trade negotiations clearly demonstrates how business interests influenced, for example, French and US trade policies (Milner 1988). See Stichele (1998) and OXFAM International (2002) for elaboration of how similar practices continue today.

The seven non-government members of the official Canadian delegation were:

- Liam McCreery, President of the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance (CAFTA). CAFTA, according to information provided on its website, is “a national coalition of associations, organizations and companies that advocates the liberalization of agri-food markets. CAFTA was created to ensure that the interests of its members are effectively represented in international trade negotiations through co-operation with federal, provincial and international governments and international industry.” Key board members of CAFTA include, among others, Cargill, Agricore, the Canadian Meat Council (packersprocessors), Canada Beef Export, the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association, the Canadian Sugar Institute (manufacturers), the Malting Industry Association of
Canada (malting companies), and the Canadian Oilseed Processors Association (crushers and processors). CAFTA is a strong advocate of a completely liberalized trade regime.

- Don Knoerr, former president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and current Chair of the Agriculture, Food and Beverage Sectoral Advisory Group on International Trade (SAGIT). SAGIT is a private-sector advisory committee with representation from bulk commodity and value-added product sectors. It provides advice on international trade and business development to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of International Trade.

- William Dymond, Executive Director of the Centre for Trade Policy and Law. Two of Mr. Dymond’s important achievements are his involvement as a senior advisor to the Trade Negotiations Office for the Canada-U.S. Free-trade Agreement and his role as chief negotiator for Canada for the OECD Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI).

- Peter Clark, President of Grey, Clark, Shih and Associates, Limited. This is a law firm specializing in international trade.

- Brian Oleson, Senior Economist with the Canadian Wheat Board, a state trading enterprise in the business of selling grain on the international market on behalf of farmers’ interests.

- The civil society voice, as this paper defines civil society, was represented by Ann Weston, Vice President of The North-South Institute, an independent research institute.

- The farm voice was limited to Bob Friesen, president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA), a pro-liberalization farm organization.

This is, of course, an oversimplification of a complex debate. Those who opposed the trade agreements were often slated as anti-trade and protectionist. In reality most were not against trade per se but rejected the terms, conditions, and processes being proposed in regional trade agreements and in the GATT-WTO. They sought to establish a fair and socially responsible trade regime.

In an interview with the Economic Times (2000), Sharad Joshi, leader of the Shetkari Sanghatana, argued that “the solution [for Indian farmers] is nothing short of pulling ourselves up by the bootstraps and altering our very style of agriculture.” He also suggested that government intervention in agriculture was a major barrier because “anything which is protected gets stifled.”

There are, of course, a range of reasons why many organizations do not belong to IFAP. First, it is important to note that IFAP had for quite some time had the reputation of representing the interests of the larger farmers primarily in the industrialized countries (PFS 1993). This is not surprising given that the IFAP membership includes mainstream farm organizations such as, among others, the American Farm Bureau Federation, commodity groups, farm businesses, and farm organizations that are linked to agri-industry. The NFU in Canada, for example, at one point contemplated membership in IFAP but ultimately opted not to join because it concluded that IFAP simply did not represent the interests of smaller farmers (Easter 2002). Since the early 1990s IFAP has engaged in more concerted efforts to recruit members from developing countries (PFS 1993). Second, there is also the question of membership costs. IFAP member fees are paid based on a formula that in some cases can run up to tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars. For many financially strapped peasant organizations, this fee structure meant that membership was simply out of the question. Recently, IFAP has taken steps to facilitate the entry of organizations from the South by lowering membership fees. Third, some organizations did not belong to IFAP simply because they had never been approached and did not know of its existence.

It is worth noting that the NFU (in the US) is a member of IFAP but it also joined the Vía Campesina in the 1999-2000 period.
For example, in 1993, the same year that the Vía Campesina emerged, IFAP launched an initiative geared mainly to developing countries called “The Worldwide Action for Strengthening Farmers.” Further pursuing this goal, IFAP recently restructured its Development Cooperation Committee in attempts to channel more funds — sometimes via Northern farm organizations — to Southern farm organizations. IFAP also works closely with the World Bank on issues of rural poverty and sustainable development. For example, the World Bank sponsored a number of farmers’ workshops in developing regions, an IFAP Millennium Survey on Farmers’ Organizations and Development to identify the needs and activities of farm organizations, and publication of the IFAP/World Bank Source Book on Farmers’ Organizations.

In 1998, *Fortune* magazine ranked the American Farm Bureau Federation as the 14th most influential organization in Washington; in 1999 the organization ranked 21st. According to the Centre for Responsive Politics, the American Farm Bureau Federation spent $4.56 million on lobbying in Washington in 1998 alone. In addition, state farm bureaus spent another $250,000 (Monks, Ferris and Campbell 2000, p. 50-51).

It is worth noting that of the 45 farmer representatives listed in the IFAP delegation to Doha, only nine were from developing countries. See IFAP (2001) for the complete list.

See Einarsson (2000) for an analysis of how fundamental the “right to export” is to the WTO Agreement on Agriculture. This “right to export,” of course, is congruent with the WTO’s view of food security, which is perhaps best defined as having access to an “adequate amount of imported food” (Stevens et al., 2000:3, emphasis added).

It is important to note here that Sutherland misrepresented IFAP’s position. While IFAP agreed with the general thrust of liberalized trade, they also raised a number of clear reservations and caveats to the draft agreement (Wiebe 2001).

UPS recently changed its name to Uni-Terre.

As *The Economist* (December 11, 1999, 19) pointed out in its post-Seattle analysis, the WTO should learn from the World Bank’s largely successful strategy of co-option and “try to weaken the grand coalition that attacked it in Seattle by reaching out to mainstream and technical NGOs.”

See Edmunds and Wollenberg (2001) for an excellent analysis of the dangers of multi-stakeholder negotiations for disadvantaged groups. The authors argue that multi-stakeholder negotiations can and often do perpetuate abuses of power and inequity and thus silence opposition and possibilities for effective change.

As we have seen, the international space is now filled with two distinct farm voices: the Vía Campesina and IFAP. Yet, interestingly, IFAP continues to claim an expanded status to that of being the “world’s farmers” organization that arrives at “world farmers” policy statements on trade at its “world farmers” congresses. This, of course, raises issues of representation and accountability, to say nothing of ethics!

Please note that this paper uses the terms “international non-government organizations” (INGOs) and “national non-governmental organizations” (NGOs) interchangeably.

See Alvarez (1998) for an excellent analysis of how the “NGOization” of feminists and their organizations led to uneasy relations and strong divisions between grassroots or popular women’s
organizations and feminist NGOs working on “their behalf.” Alvarez’s analysis focuses on issues of representation, interlocution, accountability, and legitimacy.

35 The Vía Campesina had brought over 60 delegates to the WFS, many of whom did not speak English. Since there was little translation during the NGO Forum, many felt that they simply could not participate.

36 Although the Vía Campesina did not sign the “WTO-Shrink or Sink! The Turn Around Agenda” document, it was connected to the process. By the time this statement was redrafted into “Our World is Not for Sale: WTO Shrink or Sink,” the Vía Campesina then became a signatory (Verhagen 2001).

37 Detailed accounts of the internal dynamics of the WTO are found in reports from Focus on Trade (Number 63, May 2001 and Number 69, November 2001). Also see Aileen Kwa’s reports dated June 2001 and October 18, 2001, and her most recent publication (2002).

38 For the full text, see the Council of Canadians website at http://www.canadians.org.

39 Some of the main organizations responsible for spearheading the “Our World is Not for Sale” strategies and actions leading up to Doha were: the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), Friends of the Earth International (FoEI), the International Forum on Globalization (IFG), Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch (GTW), the Via Campesina and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples.

40 In the spring of 2001, the Vía Campesina and Friends of the Earth called a meeting with farmers’ organizations and NGOs to discuss joint strategies on trade, agriculture and food sovereignty. Following this meeting, a sub-group was formed to draft the Peoples’ Food Sovereignty document (Verhagen 2001). Organizations participating in the “Our World is Not for Sale” coalition then formed the Peoples’ Food Sovereignty Network to focus more specifically on issues of food, agriculture, and globalization. This network is now called the Agri-Trade Group. “Priority to Peoples’ Food Sovereignty — WTO Out of Food and Agriculture” was developed by the Agri-Trade Group and launched by the Vía Campesina; COASAD; Collectif Stratègies Alimentaires; the ETC Group (formerly RAFI); Focus on the Global South; Foodfirst/Institute for Food and Development Policy; Friends of the Earth Latin America and Caribbean; Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland; GRAIN; the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP); the IBON Foundation Inc.; and the Public Citizen’s Energy and Environment Program.

41 Please note that I have taken the liberty of altering the language in some of these points in the interests of shortening the text. For the complete statement please see www.peoplesfoodsovereignty.org/new/statement.container.htm

42 See Walden Bello’s (2001a) “Learning from Doha” for an excellent analysis of the Doha process and outcomes.

43 See Kwa (2002) for certainly the most in-depth analysis to date of the WTO’s practices. For other accounts see Focus on Trade (2002), a report from the Coalition of Civil Society groups in Doha (2001a and 2001b), Agence France Presse (2001b), Third World Network Info Service on WTO issues (2001), and the Joint Statement of NGOs and Social Movements (2002).

44 Charlene Barshefsky, the former US trade representative who played an important role in the Singapore, Geneva, and Seattle WTO Ministerial meetings, had this to say about the WTO process: “The process, including even at Singapore as recently as three years ago, was a rather exclusionary one. All

“The WTO . . . will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!” 41
meetings were held between 20 and 30 key countries. . . And that meant 100 countries were never in the room.” (Quoted in Bello 2000, 5) Bello went on to explain that in attempts to reach consensus in Seattle Barshesfsky warned delegates: “. . . [I] have made very clear and I reiterated to all ministers today that, if we are unable to achieve that goal, I fully reserve the right to also use a more exclusive process to achieve a final outcome. There is no question about either my right as the chair to do it or my intention as the chair to do it . . .” (ibid).

45 So-named after a room in the WTO Secretariat, in which informal negotiations take place. The Green Room practice is often criticized because the negotiations are by invitation and therefore not transparent or representative.

46 In analyzing the Doha Ministerial Declaration, CSOs claimed that it failed on a number of counts. Since there is much talk in the mainstream press proclaiming Doha as the start of a “Development Round,” it is worth quoting the statement at length. CSOs argued that the declaration is “everything but development” because it:

- does not make any significant progress on developing countries’ implementation concerns, and thus the immense problems arising from the existing WTO agreements will intensify;
- does not make a real commitment to support the concept of food sovereignty through the reduction of direct and indirect support for export as well as the dumping of artificially cheap food export to developing countries and does not offer meaningful protection to small farmers especially in developing countries, thus enabling the decimation of farmers’ livelihoods worldwide;
- does not resolve any of the negative consequences of the TRIPS Agreement, including biopiracy and prevention of the fulfillment of basic consumer rights, despite the political statement on TRIPS and public health (which does not add legally to the rights of states to take public health measures);
- launches negotiations for market access on industrial products which will pressurize developing countries to further reduce their tariffs, and threaten many with further deindustrialisation, closure of local firms and job losses;
- facilitates the liberalisation and privatisation of natural resources such as water in the guise of eliminating barriers to environmental goods and services, and this threatens people’s rights worldwide to water and other natural resources; and
- reduces and trivialises substantial development concerns as matters of technical assistance and ‘capacity building’ in an attempt to push developing countries on to negotiations” (Joint Statement of NGOs and Social Movements 2002).

47 This statement was made by Tony Clarke from the Polaris Institute during the “Our World is Not for Sale” strategy meeting held in Brussels on December 7-9, 2001. Clarke was reporting back from a small group discussion on future strategies vis-à-vis the WTO.
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