



Powerful Ideas, Practical Actions

# Haitian Farmers: So All Can Eat, Produce It Here

Haitians are working to make food sovereignty a key part of post-earthquake rebuilding.

By Doudou Pierre with Beverly Bell

posted Jun 15, 2010

Doudou Pierre is on the coordinating committee of the National Haitian Network for Food Sovereignty and Food Security (RENHASSA). He is also a member of the International Coordinating Committee for Food Sovereignty, organized by Via Campesina, the worldwide coalition of small farmer organizations, as well as the National Peasant Movement of the Papay Congress and the Peasant Movement for Acul du Nord. Here, he speaks about how government investment in small farmers and in food sovereignty could impact Haiti's future.



Photo by Alice Speri.

On June 4, 10,000 Haitians, most of them peasant farmers, marched for food sovereignty and an end to Monsanto's recent donation of seeds. The banner reads: "Defend food sovereignty in our country and the planet."

We're putting together a national network, RENHASSA, to show what our alternatives are today. The whole peasant sector is coming together to tell everyone about the policies we want. Our mission is to advocate for Haiti to be sovereign with its food and to promote national production.

We're mobilizing politically for the policies we want. We publish articles and do community radio programs about our positions. We're also doing media campaigns and having meetings to educate people about growing for local and family consumption as much as possible, instead of buying food from other countries. People are starting to recognize and change their habits to just buy local goods.

But the state must exercise its responsibility toward its people. When we talk about reconstructing Haiti, we can't just talk about houses. It's got to be a whole plan. We have to talk about reconstructing land—about total reforestation.

First, we have to decentralize the Republic of Port-au-Prince, which got created during the U.S. occupation of 1915 to 1934. Services now exist only in the capital. People died during the earthquake for an identity card or a copy of a transcript, because they had to come to Port-au-Prince to get them. Services must be in all departments [akin to states]. All the people who are in the countryside have to have the resources to stay there.

Second—and this is the essential element—is the relaunching of agriculture in this country. We were almost self-sufficient until the 1980s. We have to fight and pressure

**Right now, the government doesn't even exist for us. It's saying to the international community, 'Here's our country. Come take it.'**

the state so that it prioritizes agriculture. Otherwise, we'll always have to depend on multinationals and non-governmental organizations for our food. The government has to take responsibility for that.

We're not in favor just of food security, which is a neoliberal idea. With food security, as long as you eat, it's good. But we only produce 43 percent of our food. 57 percent is imported. **We need food sovereignty**, which means that for everyone to eat, we produce it here at home. We could produce here at least 80 percent of what we eat.

You can't speak of food sovereignty without speaking of family agriculture. We need that and **we need indigenous seeds**. We need for peasants to have their own land.

We have threats from multinationals, mainly to grow jatropha [whose seeds produce oil which can be used for biofuel]. The Jatropha Foundation is lobbying hard to start growing. Jatropha puts us at risk, because we don't have enough land to be able to divert some toward biofuel. Haiti is only 27,760 square kilometers. Their plan would have us produce even less food, and would force peasants to be expropriated. Plus, they'd be using a lot of **water**, which could create an ecological disaster. It's a death plan against the peasants.

We're mobilizing people against growing biofuel. Last October, when the government was considering giving contracts to grow jatropha, we held a big march and sit-in; we gave a petition to parliament. We said, "No, Haiti's land is for growing food." We met with the minister of agriculture and the World Food Program.