



For Immediate Release

Whose 'Green Revolution'?

African and Canadian Farm Leaders Say African 'Green Revolution' Won't Benefit Farmers

OTTAWA, March 21, 2007 – It's being called a new "Green Revolution" for Africa – but who will this revolution really benefit? That is the question that farm leaders and scientists from Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Canada will ask at a public forum in Ottawa on **Monday March 26** entitled "**Green Revolution: Whose Revolution?**"

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has joined forces with the Rockefellers to launch a new "Green Revolution" in Africa. The \$US150 million initiative intends to spur agricultural development in Africa by bringing more chemical fertilizers, pesticides and "improved seeds" to farmers. The idea has captured the interest of many Canadian parliamentarians, including MP Belinda Stronach.

Pat Mooney, Executive Director of the Ottawa-based ETC Group, welcomes the attention to agriculture, but has serious concerns about the approach. "To those of us who witnessed the first Green Revolution in Asia in the 1960s and 70s, this is all déjà-vu," he says. "There's no doubt that productivity and yields were increased in some crops, but the damage caused by that model of industrial agriculture is clear today. With farmers growing a handful of export crops with heavy use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, we've seen an alarming erosion in biodiversity and soil fertility."

"We'll be watching closely to make sure hundreds of millions of dollars aren't spent making the same mistakes again," he says.

Canadian farmer **Colleen Ross**, Women's President of the National Farmers Union, is just back from the World Forum on Food Sovereignty in Mali. She says Canadian farmers can relate to the global perspectives heard there. "We've been going down this road for a while ourselves. We're seeing how modern farming is disenfranchising the very people who produce our food," says Ross. "Whether in Africa or Canada, high input agriculture is taking money out of our hands and putting it in the pockets of agribusiness."

She notes that in the past few years agribusiness companies have posted record profits while Canadian family farms have reported some of the lowest incomes ever recorded.

Farmers from around the world who gathered at the conference say a new Green Revolution in agriculture is not the solution to hunger and poverty in Africa. Malian farm movement leader **Mamadou Goïta** says the high costs of agricultural inputs, coupled with unfair trade rules and prices, mean that farmers will remain in debt, and economically dependent on others. "This Green Revolution will bring a flood of experts, seeds and inputs from outside," says Goita. "We will lose control of our seeds, and the ability to make our own choices about what we grow, and for whom. And the global market works against African farmers. The result will be more, not less, hunger and poverty in our communities."

Faris Ahmed of USC Canada, one of the organizers of the upcoming forum, says we only have to turn to farmers themselves for the answer. USC has been working with thousands of farmers for 20 years through the acclaimed Seeds of Survival Program. "Farming communities we work with in Mali, India or Ethiopia see their fields as places of innovation, and are constantly improving their seeds," says Ahmed. "These crops are affordable, often nutritionally superior, and better adapted to difficult growing conditions. The community has the freedom to save them, plant them, experiment with them, and even feed their families in times of crisis. And that's what I would call a homegrown green revolution."

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