

Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-ecology —Occupy Your Life Manifesto—

The *Towards Organic Asia* (TOA) project organized a young organic farmers gathering at Tha Tang farm in Paksé, PDR Laos, October 2012. From Paksé the group travelled by bus to the Asia Europe Peoples' Forum (AEPF) in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, and presented its 'Occupy Your Life' Manifesto. The full text of the Manifesto follows here.

The TOA project was initiated in the framework of the School for Wellbeing after the visit of Vandana Shiva to Thailand in 2010. The TOA movement is developing gradually from a Mekong region + Bhutan partnership into an Asia-wide network. CCFD-Terre Solidaire supports the School for Wellbeing and its TOA programme.

[Vandana Shiva, founder of Navdanya, will speak in Bangkok and Chiangmai, Maejo University, again in December 2012.] A major TOA activity in 2013 will be an international consultation with URGENCI Asia and the global IFOAM PGS Committee. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) promotes increasingly an approach to quality control of organic products based on participatory interaction, so by direct cooperation and mutual support between local producers and consumers, without the need for "third party" inspection. Social enterprises can play an important facilitating role. URGENCI is the global network of 'community supported agriculture' (CSA) initiatives with a growing network in Asia including the Teikei pioneers in Japan



Young organic farmers gather at Paksé, PDR Laos.

and 'networks of networks' formed by small-scale farmers and local consumers' associations in India. The first CSA initiative in Thailand celebrated its 10th anniversary on 7th December 2012.

We are the Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-ecology. We write this manifesto in support of happiness in a system of agriculture, which includes healthy and abundant nature, healthy communities and a thriving economy.

Occupy Your Life follows the general principles of the Occupy Wall Street movement but focuses on the regaining of livelihoods of young farmers. Taking back responsibility and reclaiming our role in food production, instead of outsourcing to supermarkets grow our own food and get close to our food source. We should reclaim our health and consume healthy food rather than relying on hospitals and medicine.

Innovative, young, small-scale, diversified farmers are the future of agriculture. In order to

secure our agricultural future we need to preserve biodiversity and manage the landscape in harmony with nature, use waste wisely and ensure fair access to fresh and clean water, offer respect for people to work with dignity.

We need to build on the creative potential of youth to solve global crises. Small-scale farms that work in harmony with nature and are run by young farmers are the solution to many global crises in that they offer climate change adaptation and mitigation, stop erosion, create sustainable and healthy local food systems, keep young people in rural areas and prevent urbanization, and stop the loss of cultural diversity and traditions. These small farms help to change the course of things for rural people by alleviating poverty and creating food sovereignty.

Nature

Nature is beautiful and has a value in itself.

Forests are a source of food. They are the mothers of rivers

and they form the foundation of watersheds. They are an important source of medicine, culture, and spiritual fulfillment.

We need integrated holistic thinking and philosophy in farm design, utilizing synergistic relationships within farming systems and in harmony with nature.

Our health, and the health of our communities, depends on healthy soil. Farming should work toward building soil organic matter, preventing and controlling erosion, preserving soil biodiversity and respecting soil life. We should practice farming with a long term focus, using more permanent crops and poly cultivation.

We need to preserve the genetic diversity of seed and livestock through building and supporting regional connections for small-scale diversified farms.

Economy

Young farmers are redefining economy with respect toward the values of nature and society. We need to change the way we think about economy. We are part of an interconnected web of life—exchanges are more than just monetary units. We need to work together, focusing on cooperation and friendliness rather than competition.

We should strengthen networks and offer support for grassroots actions for farming with dignity, integrity and self-reliance and to promote a pro-farming society that makes wise use of resources including wastes.

We envision a world where the producer and consumer choose health and happiness; they should feel a kinship. People should eat healthy local food and get to know their farmer. Farmers should care for consumers and produce wholesome food. Mind-

ful marketing, community supported agriculture, and farmer's markets can support the relationship between the producer and consumer.

Small-scale farms should have access to fair and reliable funding, building up wealth for their families and in the farming landscape in the form of healthy communities and abundant biological resources.

Society

Viable agricultural systems require strong communities, grassroots movements and young farmer networks. These communities form their own agreements based on self-regulation and open systems of management according to tradition and local knowledge. They agree on clear and pertinent rules to follow that help guide community actions and serve as a fundamental building block for food security and access to healthy living.

Traditional belief and wisdom gives meaning to life offering insights for living together with nature and creating ecological farming practices. Farming systems should have respect for culture and traditional beliefs and thereby see an intrinsic value in the landscape.

We need clear information sharing and transparency in education. Schools should serve to support and increase traditional agricultural knowledge. Young people should have access to information and training about farming sustainably.

Education is a fundamental aspect of small-scale diversified farming. It provides young people with opportunities for growth and personal development, cultivating not just food but people. These farms operate within a participatory learning process where farmers share methodolo-

gies and skills and help to convey the mindset of an occupied and active life.

There is an intrinsic value in animals. They deserve to be treated as friends and with respect and care. Food from animals is a gift. They deserve fair treatment, good health, and good living conditions. We need localized closed systems where healthy feed comes from a diverse farm and local community.

Happiness

We should promote happiness as a fundamental pillar of life. Our lives are dependent on all other life forms, when eating we should be aware and thankful for the hard work of farmers and to the web of life and society that brought us the food. Farmers are amazing people in that they work so hard to grow our food and get so little in return. We need to create agricultural chains and systems that support and acknowledge the hard work that farmers are doing and help create good conditions for them to work with dignity. Through their hard work farmers bring others happiness while fostering their own contentment like roots in the soil.

We should take care of people in need and 'share the abundance' through fair resource distribution.

Conclusion

We support happiness in farming, including healthy and vibrant systems of nature, community and economy. We need to take back the roles of young farmers in food production, reclaiming right livelihood.

Young farmers are the future of agriculture, which preserves biodiversity and an occupied life. They practice natural harmonious farming and offer respect and dignity for commu-

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