

## **Food sovereignty as a way to achieve food security: Small steps in the Czech Republic towards sustainable agricultural production and consumption**

The notion of food sovereignty is rooted in the refusal of farmers, peasants and other food producers and civic organizations to see their domestic food markets subject to the vagaries of international market forces. It is now an increasingly used concept in the development debate seeking more control over food production, trade and consumption. There is a difference between food security and food sovereignty, the first one setting the goal, the other defining the way to realize it. Food security means that all people have physical and economic access to basic food at all times, as defined by the United Nations. The main determinant of food insecurity is the vulnerability of people, which in turn is induced by poverty. Poverty makes people unable to feed themselves, i.e. to produce sufficient and adequate food or to raise sufficient income to buy food. Poverty eradication is thus a key factor in the achievement of household food security. For that to happen, the specificity of small-scale agriculture must be recognized as being the main source of income and livelihoods for the poor in several developing countries, especially in Africa (approximately 80% of Africa's poor live in rural areas). This is where food sovereignty, a concept born from civic mobilization, comes to the forefront as it is a policy framework that underlines the right of nations and their people to define their own food production systems (production, distribution, and consumption) without having to depend on the fluctuating international markets. It is thus not possible to fully realize food sovereignty without controlling the main determinants of agricultural policies today, i.e. rules regarding tariffs and domestic support, which are decided within trade policies (especially through the World Trade Organization).

### **Food sovereignty and the Czech Republic**

By asserting the view that the main instrument to solving the global economic crisis and eradicating poverty is the free market, the Czech Republic repeats the often criticized view of dominant economic thinking which has already proved unbeneficial towards food security in many developing nations. The Czech Republic omits the need to recognize the diversity of agricultural systems and to balance the market power of giant agricultural corporations over small farmers, both in developing countries as well as in Europe. Not only is the Czech Republic lagging behind with any active participation in the international debate on food security, but it is also facing challenges to make the market deliver fair incomes to Czech farmers, who are more and more dependent on subsidies. The area of farmland in the Czech Republic has been dramatically decreasing – since 1995 fifteen thousand hectares of agricultural land have disappeared – and with it the big number of people working in the sector. Former Czechoslovakia used to belong to the most advanced states in Europe with regard to its food production. This is not the case anymore. The change came after 1989 when former Czechoslovakia turned to neoliberal market practices which do not support national food sovereignty. Many policies in fact hindered agricultural businesses (certain protective laws stopped applying, bank loans were difficult to obtain, etc.) and after joining the EU there were further problems with the budget support of the “new” EU members being considerably lower than that of the “old” EU members.

Although the food sovereignty movement is not deeply anchored in the Czech Republic, there are several local movements that are beginning to support other modes of food production and consumption, albeit with no explicit advocacy message involved. For example, a new type of

marketing emerged in 2009 which promotes biological, locally produced agricultural products, sold directly from farmers or cooperatives to consumers. As an example we could mention the so-called “bedynky” (baskets) system, which works to regularly deliver to consumers a defined quantity of vegetables and fruits, dairy products, herbs, bread or meat produced by local farmers. This system is considered important not only because it offers people access to fresh, locally grown food, but also because it brings fair income to farmers and helps recreate the lost personal relationship between consumers and food providers. Vegetable markets are also on the rise, especially in the capital city, Prague. In the past year, milk vending machines have gained in popularity as they sell fresh milk directly from farmers. This system supports especially small farmers by considerably improving the price they get per liter of milk (often twice the amount and more). These direct marketing concepts found inspiration in the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model which has been working in Japan, Western Europe and the USA since the 1970s. CSA basically involves consumers supporting a farm, whereby both the growers and consumers share the risks and benefits of food production.

To change the status quo of practically zero participation of Czech citizens in the food security and food sovereignty debate, the Prague Global Policy Institute - Glopolis has initiated policy and public debate with non-governmental organizations, farmers and decision makers in the Czech Republic and in Europe, raising awareness about growing food insecurity and poverty faced by the poor in developing countries, triggered by the dominant business approach to agriculture, which too often ignores people and natural environment

*Christine Maritz*  
*Prague Global Policy Institute - Glopolis*  
*Soukenická 1189/23*  
*110 00 Praha 1*  
*Czech Republic*  
*email: [info@glopolis.org](mailto:info@glopolis.org)*  
*tel. +420 272 661 132*  
*[www.glopolis.org](http://www.glopolis.org)*



This article has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Polish Green Network and its partners and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union. The article has been produced also as a part of the project “Central European partnership for sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty” co-financed by the International Visegrad Fund.