

OUTSIDE CONTRIBUTION



Source: [Illustration](#) by Mahla Bess Raphael

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION: THE A TEAM FOUNDATION

Anna Van Der Hurd

SUMMARY: The A Team Foundation supports ecologically sustainable, localised food systems, returning power to growers and choice to consumers so that high quality, nutritionally dense food is accessible to all. This article discusses adverse impact of multinational seed and fertilizer corporations and how you can support organizations making a difference in supporting community agriculture and traditional wisdom in farming practice.

Introduction

The system that drives farmers into a debt trap creates malnutrition. The solution lies in shifting from a toxic, high-cost system to a nutritious, low-cost, sustainable food production model. - [Vandana Shiva](#)

In 2009 [The A Team Foundation](#) a philanthropic Foundation based in the United Kingdom started with a few questions; Why was the seemingly simple act of eating well a privilege of the few? Why were child obesity rates sky rocketing, and malnourishment holding steady? Could the pesticides and herbicides ubiquitously used in conventional farming be causing untold harm to our children and the planet, and could the food we were feeding our children be making them sick?

Certainly, we were not the first to ask these questions. Propelled by a deep longing to correct course we embarked upon a journey of discovery that continues to unfold, meeting and learning from the people and organisations in the UK and around the world that have dedicated their lives to addressing the issues we saw starkly before us. The more we learned from our grant recipients and their networks, the greater our understanding of the interconnectivity of the problems we faced, and the solutions.

THE CRISIS OF OBESE, MALNOURISHED
PEOPLE AND THE DESPAIR OF CULTIVATORS

How is an overweight and simultaneously malnourished child in the US connected to an aging Indian farmer brought to despair and then suicide? Those that control seed, control life. Since the Green Revolution in the late 1960's multinational agrochemical companies have been selling "miracle" seeds and poisonous chemicals as a two-for-one false promise to unsuspecting farmers globally. Wherever these 'miracle' seeds went, there was a new thirst for water, an addiction to pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and consequently ecosystem and livelihood collapse. Without subsidies, farmers struggle to pay for these products that require continual purchase year on year. One bad crop and farmers face crushing debt, with limited means of paying for more seeds and the synthetic inputs they need to grow. In 2022 up to 30 Indian farmers die by [suicide daily](#). While on the other side of the world and increasing all over the world, children are being fed the end result of the commodity crops soya, maize (corn) and wheat, in the form of highly processed, nutritionally void foods.

Since the dawn of agrarian life, farmers--often women--saved their seeds with great care, choosing the highly flavorsome, nutritious, and adaptive plants, the ones they saw thriving in their regionalized environments, for free. Now faced with the harsh realities of seed capture as opposed to the high yielding pest and weed resistant crops farmers were promised, [growers](#) are returning to the wisdom of their ancestors and building upon this rich heritage and field-based science. There are many [working](#) on the ground to support the spread of this knowledge, and in the process nourishing plant diversity, food security and health, in the face of the climate crisis, biodiversity collapse and economic uncertainty.

The issues we face seem vast and multiple and often they are exhibited singularly, or sometimes coupled but rarely are we presented with the complexity of the web we are presently caught in. Systemic and entrenched issues of discrimination, the growing gap between the wealthy and poor, and now in

2022 food shortages and hyperinflation are impacting the majority. We, as a society, have been building a system of short-term gain and not one of resilience. By allowing multinational corporations to control our food systems, putting profit before health and community, we have allowed interests that serve the few to dictate what we eat, how our food is farmed, processed, delivered and in the process have exploited the planet to breaking point. And all the while chronic illnesses are increasingly frequent, especially amongst historically marginalised communities. We seem to have lost our connection to the biosphere and compassion for each other.

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF THIS EPIDEMIC

It was estimated in 2021 by the [CDC](#) that [78%](#) of those who have been hospitalized, needed a ventilator or died with Covid-19 were overweight or obese. According to the World Health Organisation, [2.2 million of the pandemic's 2.5 million](#) global deaths were in countries with high levels of obesity. In the USA, Non-Hispanic Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) adults have the highest rates of obesity and diabetes and were tragically the most likely to [die with Covid-19](#).

BIPOC communities continue to be the worst hit by our failed food system, often living in food deserts where nutritious food is unavailable or priced out of locally grown organic foods. The pandemic brought to light how deeply broken and fragile our food system is, with global supply chain breakdown and exacerbated inequities of accessing healthy food. Covid-19 tested and wholeheartedly supported the theory that localized food systems were the most resilient. With supermarkets shelves empty, many that could turned to their local farmers, [box schemes](#) and other creative localized food delivery services that were popping up to meet the new demand. Many [grassroots groups](#) quickly organized to meet the new challenges of food distribution and access for the most vulnerable during global lockdowns, and in the process

supported the local regenerative and agroecological farmers that were truly feeding us.

FORGING A NEW PATH AHEAD

Like the mycelium that grows abundant in healthy soils, there is a thriving global interconnected community of people and movements that are forging a new path.

There are many hands that work together to rebuild the abundance in our soils and biosphere: the small holder farmers that still grow 80% of the food we eat, seed savers, soil scientists, black farmer organisations, indigenous communities, campaigners, community volunteers, millers, shop owners, investors, lawyers, chefs, bakers, journalists, policy experts, doctors, teachers, activists, ranchers, butchers and many more. We all have a birth right collectively squandered, and thus we all have a role to play. People who deeply care for each other and this earth, form a multifaceted system of resistance and offer tried and tested solutions to the numerous issues we face. As long as people and planet are put before runaway profits, as long as we respect and listen to the diverse voices who wish to reclaim the land and our food, as long as we only take what we need, as long as we understand all is connected and we keep curious, we can build the food systems that offer our salvation.

About the Author

Anna Van Der Hurd is the Chief Executive at the A Team Foundation. Learn more at www.ateamfoundation.org

The A Team Foundation supports food and land projects that are ecologically, economically and socially conscious. We contribute to the wider movement that envisions a future where real food is produced by enlightened agriculture and access to it is equal.

ORGANIZATIONS FUNDED BY THE A TEAM FOUNDATION THAT MAKE AN IMPACT

[The Land Workers Alliance](#)
[Kindling Trust](#)
[Seed Sovereignty](#)
[The Ecological Land Coorporative](#)
[Food Ethics Council](#)
[Sustain](#)
[The Perennial Fund](#)
[Almendrehesa](#)
[The Agroecology Fund](#)
[CSA Network UK](#)
[Sustainable Food Trust](#)
[Land in Our Names](#)
[Farmerama Radio](#)
[Pasture for Life](#)
[Beyond GM](#)
[Growing Communities](#)
[Real Farming Trust](#)
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GETTING INVOLVED

To support our work or the work of our grantees directly, please be in touch: info@ateamfoundation.org ✱