

FOOD SECURITY

This Charter was developed in 2005 at the time of the first world-wide food security crisis. It was debated over a series of meetings that LALIT organized with 10 other organizations and a few individual academics who together formed a Common Front on Food Security. The full title of the Charter is: “*In times of globalization & food shortages, the Charter of the Common Front on Food Security.*”

CHARTER

Given that:

- o The world food crisis is characterized by both food shortages and price rises;
- o Food ought not ever to be hostage to capitalist profits;
- o Speculation and the grip that cartels have on production & distribution aggravate the food crisis;
- o There is a danger that some producers or distributors hoard food, and provoke a black market that then further aggravates the crisis;
- o An increasing share of food production is being steered into bio-fuels, for reasons of profit;
- o GMOs push food production further into the grip of private multinationals like Monsanto & Novartis;
- o Many countries that produce rice and wheat are controlling or even halting their food exports altogether, in a bid to reduce price rises and shortages on their own national markets;
- o Experts predict that the shortages will persist for a long time to come, and will get worse;
- o Geographically speaking, Mauritius is far from the sources of its staples, its milk and many other foodstuffs, in times when freight costs are rising, due to fuel price rises which, in turn, add to the price of food;
- o Food security is essential to the very survival of a people;

Given that,

- o For the very first time in the history of our country, there is an opportunity for the broad masses of the people to put into question land ownership and use in the Republic of Mauritius,

Given that:

- o Almost all good agricultural land in the Island of Mauritius is under *cane*;
- o All Government facilities, until today, benefit cane planters to the detriment of food planters (through whole institutions like the MSIRI, as well as others that ensure loans, seeds, insurance);
- o Just like all non-sugar agriculture in the Island of Mauritius, the whole of agriculture in the Island of Rodrigues is neglected by the State, relative to the support it has given and continues to give to cane planters; there is no support for planters who produce food, whether in Mauritius or Rodrigues;
- o There is a lack of irrigation in the Islands of Rodrigues and in certain parts of the Island of Mauritius;
- o The price of sugar is going to fall, and will be unstable and unpredictable, because the guaranteed market and price is now over;
- o The sugar estates are the owners of a huge proportion of good agricultural land, and they are converting much of it into buildings or into IRS with their golf courses;
- o The agricultural policies of successive Governments have brought about the wholesale destruction of jobs, in times when unemployment is already around 10% (if properly calculated);
- o “Accompanying Measures” assured by the European Union, were designed as compensation to be used for the development of the entire economy, but have been used, till now (under the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy) almost entirely in order to develop the cane sector; this means the European money designed to compensate for the lowering of sugar prices, is being blown in perpetuating the cane sector to the detriment of both job creation and food security;

Given that,

- o The lagoons in Mauritius & Rodrigues are no longer renewing themselves with enough fish for food needs, but have become poorer and poorer;
- o The Republic of Mauritius is a large country, with its 2,000,000 square kilometres of sea;

Given that,

- o The broad masses have no access to land for planting or animal husbandry;
- o There is already a rich knowledge of food production, fishing, and a high degree of commitment to the soil and the sea, in the masses of people in the whole country, and in particular in Rodrigues,
- o Given that we are still living under patriarchy, women who are responsible for feeding the family are often not given the means to be able to carry out this responsibility,

Our demands:

1. That the Government, with food security in mind, undertakes a general review of all land use and all land ownership and control;
2. That the Government, in particular, undertakes a study of the four “clusters” (Medine, FUEL, Bel Vue ek SUDS), with a view, inter alia, to encouraging diversification and food security;
3. To kick off, Government must introduce laws so that all land is at once re-organized so that, for 4 months of each year, food crops can be grown *interline*, in all of the 100,000 arpents that sugar estates and in all the 90,000 arpents that small planters, now have under cane; any land owner who does not plant food crops on his land, must lease it to a planter who will do so; this concerns crops like potatoes, tomatoes, beans, onions, sweet potatoes, arwi-violets, wheat, maize, etc; This way cane will be affected less in the early stages of converting to food security;
4. Government must force sugar estates to give labourers and artisans made redundant an arpent of land on lease so that, grouped together in co-operatives, they can grow food crops;
5. Government must ensure that everyone who want to plant food crops, in towns and in villages, or living in high-rise flats, or without any land, gets access to *allotments*; that Government help people plant in *greenhouses* and on a hydroponic basis;
6. Government must introduce measures, and if necessary subsidies, for planters producing food and for animal raisers:
 - a. Provide seeds.
 - b. Provide irrigation at a reasonable price, build dams, specially in Rodrigues.
 - c. Provide pre-crop loans
 - d. Organize insurance, as in a Welfare Fund
 - e. Guarantee a market and a good price through the Marketing Board and Meat Authority, which will stabilize all food products, milk, fish, eggs, meat; organize storage for planters, animal raisers and fishers;
 - f. Create agro-industries, which will preserve and transform the food produced (canning, making oil, etc.)
 - g. Re-launch the Palmar animal rearing farm, as well as the production of animal feed, and seedlings.
 - h. Ensure marketing for agricultural produce, whether in Mauritius or abroad.
7. Government must ensure the traditional knowledge gets transmitted to the new generation, and that scientific knowledge is brought in to join hands with the traditional knowledge in Moris, Rodrig, Agalega, and Chagos, so that agriculture, animal rearing and fishing develop well.
8. Government must prevent the middle-men (milk, fish and vegetables merchants) extorting too big a share of “plus-value”; this means producers need access to co-operative credit and marketing;
9. Government must provide the money necessary for building boats that can go to the outer islands and banks, so that fishermen can get there to fish.
10. Marine resources must be controlled, pirating prevented, and the fish stocks kept up.
11. Food prices need to be fixed for producers and for people who buy the food; where necessary, the Government must create a “stabilizing fund”.
12. Government must speak out at international forums against the WTO when it blocks food production in the Third World countries, notably when the EU & USA subsidize their agriculture;
13. Government must assure a “GMO-FREE” Republic; a good side-effect of this is that it attracts “bio”-friendly tourists to the country.
14. Government must use all the above means to ensure security for the following 5 food categories:
 - a. **Staples:** a variety of these: rice, maize, manioc, potato, wheat, arwi, arrow root, sweet potatoes, bread fruit (Today there is a heavy shortage of locally produced staples.)
 - b. **Milk.** (Today we fall very short.)
 - c. **Eggs, chicken, meat.** (Most meat is imported.)
 - d. **Fish.** (Mauritius can easily be self-sufficient – Government must organize investment.)
 - e. **Vegetables, fruit, tomatoes, spices.** (Some degree of self reliance; preservation needs to be developed.)

Founder Members of the Front that launched this CHARTER:

Mouvement pour l'Autosuffisance Alimentaire

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General Trade Union Federation

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Mauritius Planters' Association

Amis de Rodrigues

Federation of PreSchool Playgroups

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Institute for Consumers Protection

LALIT