

AND MORE

- 3 The Future of Family Farming
- 6 Call for contributions
- 7 Our readers write
- 8 Theme overview: Land and land rights
- 18 Land rights in Mongolia – are more or less regulations needed?
- 21 Opinion: More and more organisations are showing what's really happening, says Robin Palmer
- 24 The contribution of local governments
- 27 Learning about ...
Women's land rights
- 28 The 2P approach in Nepal
- 30 Mind! New in print
- 32 Special section: Rio + 20
- 34 Locally rooted: Ideas and initiatives from the field
- 39 Opinion: Eric Holt-Gimenez argues that "Wall Street has been occupying our food system"
- 40 Land and Power: Oxfam's recently released report
- 42 Clashing systems and the "smart lane"
- 45 Opinion: "Investments" in southern India have very negative consequences, says Suprabha Seshan
- 46 Globally connected: More issues to consider

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Two hundred and twenty seven million hectares of land in developing countries – an area the size of Western Europe – has been sold or leased since 2001, mostly to international investors. The bulk of these land acquisitions have taken place over the past two years (see Oxfam Report: Land and Power, p.40). Think about this.

If this trend continues, the entire planet would be sold to international (and local) investors within the next two decades. No one can foresee the implications of this, but they will be far reaching.

In Africa, large tracts of agricultural land are being bought or leased by foreign investors for ridiculously low prices. In India, tour operators, movie stars, politicians, resorts, urbanites and land mafia are speculating in ever smaller pieces of land and prices are skyrocketing (see Suprabha Seshan's column on p.45). Whatever the shape of transactions, they all show one major development: land has become currency in the hands of politicians, investors and speculators – just like food and water.

Land is the basis of existence for 400 million small-scale farm families. The Earth is their "mother": she needs to be respected and cared for. These farmers will be the first victims of the present rush for land. The global rush for land is being justified by claiming that small-scale farmers are unproductive and incapable, and that the best option is to ease them out and invest in "rational" agriculture. This misrepresentation of the importance of small-scale farmers, pastoralists and forest dwellers for our planet, and the denial of their productivity and of their rights to land, food, water and other resources, must be challenged head-on.

This issue of Farming Matters has been produced with the valuable support of Oxfam Novib. It builds on a central theme for Oxfam International: the issues of land and power. Monique van Zijl invites readers to be part of a metaphoric bull (see theme overview, p.8) in which disparate alliances work in alliance with each other to create a powerful body of people and institutions that stand up for common sense. Let us join forces and support small-scale farmers in their legitimate quest for land rights.

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