

## World Food Day: Iraqi farmers aren't celebrating

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- > When the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) celebrates biodiversity
- > on World Food Day on October 16, Iraqi farmers will be mourning its loss.
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- > A new report [1] by GRAIN and Focus on the Global South has found that
- > new legislation in Iraq has been carefully put in place by the US that
- > prevents farmers from saving their seeds and effectively hands over the
- > seed market to transnational corporations. This is a disastrous turn of
- > events for Iraqi farmers, biodiversity and the country's food security.
- > While political sovereignty remains an illusion, food sovereignty for the
- > Iraqi people has been made near impossible by these new regulations.
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- > "The US has been imposing patents on life around the world through trade
- > deals. In this case, they invaded the country first, then imposed their
- > patents. This is both immoral and unacceptable", said Shalini Bhutani,
- > one of the report's authors.
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- > The new law in question [2] heralds the entry into Iraqi law of patents
- > on life forms - this first one affecting plants and seeds. This law fits
- > in neatly into the US vision of Iraqi agriculture in the future - that of
- > an industrial agricultural system dependent on large corporations
- > providing inputs and seeds.
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- > In 2002, FAO estimated that 97 percent of Iraqi farmers used saved seed
- > from their own stocks from last year's harvest or purchased from local
- > markets. When the new law - on plant variety protection (PVP) - is put
- > into effect, seed saving will be illegal and the market will only offer
- > proprietary "PVP-protected" planting material "invented" by transnational
- > agribusiness corporations. The new law totally ignores all the
- > contributions Iraqi farmers have made to development of important crops
- > like wheat, barley, date and pulses. Its consequences are the loss of
- > farmers' freedoms and a grave threat to food sovereignty in Iraq. In this
- > way, the US has declared a new war against the Iraqi farmer.
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- > "If the FAO is celebrating 'Biodiversity for Food Security' this year, it
- > needs to demonstrate some real commitment", says Henk Hobbelink of GRAIN,
- > pointing out that the FAO has recently been cosyng up with industry and
- > offering support for genetic engineering [3]. "Most importantly, the FAO
- > must recognise that biodiversity-rich farming and industry-led
- > agriculture are worlds apart, and that industrial agriculture is one of
- > the leading causes of the catastrophic decline in agricultural
- > biodiversity that we have witnessed in recent decades. The FAO cannot
- > hope to embrace biodiversity while holding industry's hand", he added.
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