

# Addressing the Agri-Food Crisis in Korea: *Implications of Food Sovereignty and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants*

Byeong-Seon YOON and Wonkyu SONG

## Abstract

*A variety of discussions about the revision of the constitution are underway in Korea. One important issue currently being debated is the rights of peasants guaranteed in agriculture-related provisions. Including peasants' rights in agriculture-related provisions is one of the key issues in this constitutional revision. La Via Campesina and other international human rights organizations first coined the term "rights of peasants" and there are now ongoing attempts to draw-up a draft declaration on the rights of peasants in the UN Human Rights Council. This paper outlines the implications of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants as a direction for a sustainable agriculture model that can suggest alternatives to the global agri-food system to be included in Korea's new constitution. To this end, this paper analyzes historical changes in the food security regime and international agri-food policies and also traces the transformation of Korean agriculture correlated with changes to the international regime. Consequently, this paper demonstrates the important contribution on discussions regarding the rights of peasants in the UN to proliferate alternative discourses on contemporary agri-food systems both at global and national level.*

**Keywords:** rights of peasants, global agri-food system, food sovereignty, alternative agri-food movement, La Via Campesina

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## Introduction

Recently, a variety of discussions have been underway in the South Korea (hereafter Korea) on the revision of the constitution, last changed in 1987 as a result of the democratization movement of the 1980s. Among them, numerous organizations calling for a revised constitution to include new provisions on the value of agriculture and food and the rights of peasants. Currently, the constitution contains only a land-to-the-tillers principle with respect to agricultural land (Article 121) and the obligation of the state to support and establish plans for agricultural development (Article 123). The Constitutional Amendment Movement Headquarters for the Realization of Peasants' Rights and the Fundamental Right to Food (hereafter referred to as "Headquarters"), comprising 45 entities including agricultural organizations and civil society organizations, was inaugurated in August 2017, and the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) has conducted a signature drive calling for agricultural values to be reflected in a new constitution.<sup>1</sup> Debates on what agricultural values should be included in the constitution and what is meant by sustainable agriculture based on such values are ongoing.

In Korea, discussions on the revision of the constitution have always included the rights of peasants. This is because there have been debates over adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasant and Other People Working in Rural Areas by the UN Human Rights Council and Open-Ended Intergovernmental Working Group (OEIWG) since 2012. The official recognition of the rights of peasants in the United Nations was first proposed by a transnational peasant movement, La Vía Campesina (LVC), and it was made into an official provision through cooperation with international human rights organizations such as FIAN International and Centre Europe-Tiers Monde (CETIM). The United Nations has moved to adopt a declaration on the rights of peasants in the international human rights system as peasants have been increasingly recognized as important

1. Over ten million people (about 20 percent of the total population) participated in the signature campaign organized by the NACF.

players in the global agricultural production system since the world food crisis of 2007/08. This has provided momentum to shed light on the importance of the agricultural sector and peasants who have sacrificed themselves for the sake of economic growth. Furthermore, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and a sustainable agriculture model has significant implications on the revision of the Korean constitution in relation to agriculture. In particular, an amendment of the constitution with regard to agriculture bears much significance in that it represents the first attempt to institutionalize food sovereignty since discussions of food sovereignty started within a grassroots movement in the mid-2000s.

This research will consider the significance of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants for the Alternative Agri-food Movement in Korea and the ongoing discussions around a potential constitutional amendment. As scholars of global and local agri-food systems and food sovereignty, the authors have had continued discussions with activists within the Food Sovereignty Movement and Alternative Agri-food Movement in Korea, in particular through participation in the Headquarters' research team. The direction and explanations of the Alternative Agri-food Movement found in this study were obtained through discussions with activists and collaborative research. This paper is comprised as follows. First, it will track the development of Korea's agriculture and governmental agricultural policies under the post-war food regime. Second, it will review the process of the development of the Alternative Agri-food Movement that resisted both the post-war food regime and later neoliberalism and sought alternatives to them. Third, it will consider from Korean perspective food sovereignty and a declaration of the rights of peasants currently being discussed at an international level.

## Food Aid to Free Trade: The Deepening Agri-Food Crisis in South Korea

The eradication of hunger was one of the major national goals of almost all countries after the Second World War, and the Food and Agriculture

Organization (FAO) of the United Nations was inaugurated in 1945 to promote international cooperation for this purpose (FAO 1985; Margulis 2013). In addition, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights included the right to food as a means to ensure an adequate level of life and social security.<sup>2</sup> After liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, food consumption that had been suppressed by the colonial rule recovered, and Korea then faced a serious shortage of food along with population growth (Research Department of the Bank of Chosun 1948). The US Army Military Government in Korea that was formed after the liberation of 1945 implemented food aid through Government Appropriations for Relief in Occupied Areas (GARIOA) to relieve shortages, which helped to temporarily combat food shortages. The FAO advocated the right to food and thus pursued a balance between food aid, food trade, and the agricultural development of each nation after the Second World War (Pritchard et al. 2016, 6). However the United States, which had a monopoly as the world's largest breadbasket, preferred to expand food aid and food trade rather than promote the agricultural development of each nation (Yoon 2006). The FAO appeared to support the balance between food aid and trade and the agricultural development of each nation on the surface, but food assistance provided in the name of realizing the right to food actually undermined the agricultural production of the beneficiary countries. In particular Korea, which underwent US Military Government rule and the Korean War, became one of the key geopolitical focal points of US strategy during the Cold War period. The Korean Peninsula bordered communist nations and was also near Japan, an important stronghold in the US' global strategy (McMichael 2009, 37–38; Yoon et al. 2013, 57). Hence Korea became a representative of the international food assistance the United States implemented to achieve its dual political and economic aims of strengthening its superpower status and disposing of its surplus agricultural products.

After the Korean War (1950–1953), food aid was significantly increased under the US Farm Surplus Importation Agreement in 1955

2. UN General Assembly, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 25 (1) (Paris, 1948).

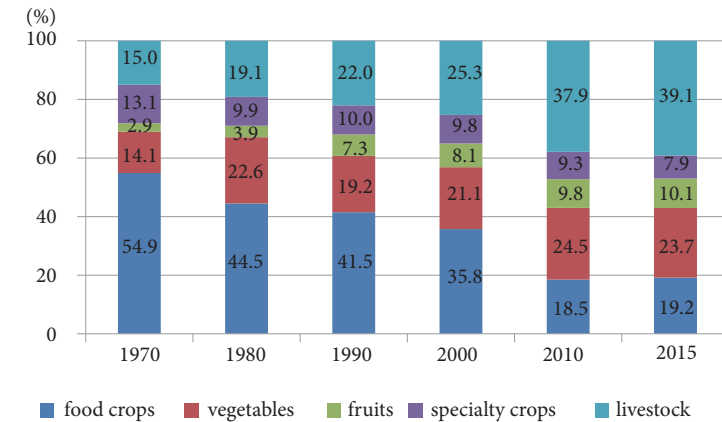
based on the US' Agricultural Trade Development Assistance Law (Public Law 480), making a huge impact on Korean agriculture. The introduction of vast amounts of surplus foods without considering domestic production caused the fall of grain prices, which discouraged farmers and destroyed the domestic agriculture base. Self-sufficiency in staple grains significantly decreased, not to mention the wheat and raw cotton that was also supplied from the United States (Yoon 1992, 140–145).

The conflict between the surplus agricultural products of the United States and the development of domestic agriculture is a leading example of the paradox of a post-war food regime that supported the necessity for both food aid and national agricultural development (Fairbairn 2010, 21). The United States chose food aid, which is effective in the short-term, instead of an increase in production through agricultural development, as the country needed to relieve hunger and grow the national economy to prevent the communization of a country—its geopolitical aim. During the years 1955–1971, the surplus agricultural products that were provided to Korea as per Public Law 480 (PL 480) amounted to 795 million dollars, 47% of which was in the form of wheat (Korea Rural Economic Institute 1999, 1: 967). Such aid strongly contributed to solving the domestic surplus of the United States. For instance, PL 480 accounted for over 78% of total US wheat exports in 1964. From this perspective, US aid in the form of surplus agricultural products actually protected its own national agricultural sector (Myrdal 1971, 351). In Korea, more than 80% of the funds raised through this aid were used to bolster the South Korea's defense budget, contributing to its military capabilities during the Cold War. The US' surplus agricultural products contributed to addressing the food shortage, but also resulted in a decrease in agricultural production and a farming crisis in Korea, essentially replacing the future right to food with immediate food aid.

With the 1970s world food crisis as momentum, the United States revised its mechanism to address surplus agriculture products by removing production limitations with the 1973 Farm Bill, and instead encouraging exports for commercial purposes, which drastically changed the relationship between US agriculture and the world economy (McMichael 2000, 131–132). However, this green power strategy has resulted in a steady

decline in food prices by providing huge subsidies to exporters to promote commercial exports and by offering products that are exported at lower prices than production cost through dumping. This meant the end of food aid (McMichael 2005, 278).

The Korean government's main responses to this international market change were to pursue self-sufficiency of rice as a staple grain together with a low food price policy to achieve economic growth led by industrial sectors, the encouragement of the cultivation of cash crops to prepare for the agricultural crisis, and the rural community development of the Saemaeul (New Community) Movement. First, along with the decline in grain prices, the pursuit of self-sufficiency of staple grain is an industrial policy geared towards rapid economic growth led by industry as well as an agricultural policy to deal with the end of food aid. Increased production and self-sufficiency in staple grain was a deliberate policy to reduce living costs for workers, as peasants were hit severely by the massive influx of surplus crops such as wheat, raw cotton, and corn as food aid. The Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation established the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines in 1962 and started to develop a high-yielding variety of rice that ultimately contributed to the development of the Tongil (Unification) rice variety in Korea (Kim 2017). Thanks to the green revolution of rice, Korea almost reached self-sufficiency in rice by the late 1970s. Production per 10 acres, which had been 287 kilogram in 1965, rose to 494 kilogram by 1977. The government forced peasants to cultivate this high yield variety of rice, implement a policy of monoculture, and conduct specialized farming, as farm households were in financial difficulties due to farming costs and the government's low grain pricing policy. As a result, farm households focused on the cultivation of a few select cash crops such as red pepper, garlic, and onions. As the share of these cash crops in agricultural income significantly increased, demand for external agricultural input such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticide sharply rose. Furthermore, government policy to encourage the livestock industry, without consideration of the domestic production of feedstuffs, replaced animal husbandry as a supplement to farm households' income with industrialized factory-style livestock. This resulted in a rapid



**Figure 1.** Changes in the value of Korean agricultural production, 1970–2015  
Source: Statistics Korea

decline in grain self-sufficiency and an unstable food supply, significantly threatening the livelihood of peasants (Figure 1).

As the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) did not make much headway after the inauguration of the World Trade Organization (WTO), multilateral trade negotiations faced a crisis. The Korean government responded by opening agricultural markets fully, signing multiple free trade agreements (FTAs) at the same time.<sup>3</sup> After the launch of the WTO and the signing of FTAs, imports of foreign agricultural products and livestock rose sharply, reaching US\$12 billion by 1996, temporarily declining during the foreign currency crisis of 1997, and then rising again significantly to over US\$20 billion by 2010 and US\$34.8 billion in 2015. The government advocated for the enhancement of international competitiveness in domestic agriculture and products amid the complete opening of the agricultural market. The government restructuring policy encouraging the expansion of farming scale and monocultures has accelerated the exit of

3. With the market opening of agricultural products since the late 1970s, Korea's import liberalization rate, which was 64.3% in 1984, rose to 92.1% in 1994. In 2015, the liberalization of the market was completed by removing tariffs on the rice market altogether.

peasants, leading to a sharp decline in the grain self-sufficiency rate and the exodus of the rural population.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the income gap between urban and farm households has widened (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Income Disparity between Farm Households and Urban Laborer Households in South Korea, 1970–2015

(Unit: ₩1,000, %)

Year	Farm Household (A)	Urban Laborer Household (B)	A/B (%)
1980	2,693	2,809	95.9
1985	5,736	5,085	112.8
1990	11,026	11,319	97.4
1995	21,803	22,933	95.1
2000	23,072	28,643	80.6
2005	30,503	39,025	78.2
2010	32,121	48,092	66.8
2015	37,215	57,800	64.4

Source: Statistics Korea. Farm Household Economy Survey and Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

The complete opening of the agricultural market by the government and food security dependent on the world market led to a number of adverse outcomes. First, the policy resulted in a crisis of peasants and small-holders, which are the main pillars of Korean agriculture. Hit by full-scale trade liberalization, peasants and small-holders, which comprise the absolute majority in terms of total farm households, faced serious polarization. Still worse, as regulations on farm land were relaxed, actually dismantling the land-to-the-tillers principle guaranteed by the constitution, they faced difficulties in even securing farmland, the basic tool of production.

Second, the basic rationale of the agricultural and food policy—a stable

4. The self-sufficiency rate of grains dropped sharply to 23.8% in 2015 from 56.0% in 1980, and the proportion of farm households to total population dropped dramatically from 28.4% in 1980 to 5.0% in 2015.

food supply and food security guarantee—weakens considerably. Due to significant price fluctuations of agricultural products, underproduction and overproduction, price spiraling and collapse occurred repeatedly with the import of foreign agricultural products. In addition, distrust of citizens deepened as a result of food safety incidents such as the conflict over full resumption of the US beef imports in 2008, the Fipronil eggs contamination in 2017, and the ongoing GMO issue.

Third, the right to food for socially vulnerable groups in both cities and rural villages worsened due to social polarization. This came at the same time as the Korean government failed to fulfill its obligation as a state to guarantee food as a basic human right, although it indirectly recognizes the right to food as per Article 6 (1) of the constitution, which states “Treaties duly concluded and promulgated under the constitution and the generally recognized rules of international law shall have the same effect as the domestic laws of the Republic of Korea.”<sup>5</sup>

Fourth, the segregation of agricultural policy from food policy was an issue. During the period of economic development in the 1960–1980s, agricultural policy focused on production expansion, which was a food policy. However, when self-sufficiency in rice was achieved in the late 1970s and quantity shortages were resolved thanks to the sharp rise of agricultural imports, production policy began to split off from consumption policy. Production policy concentrated on increasing competitiveness through scale expansion and quality improvement, while consumption policies left to the market function except for some food welfare programs. The local market that used to closely connect production to consumption disappeared.

5. Article 6 paragraph 1 of the Constitution of Republic of Korea. <http://www.moleg.go.kr/english/korLawEngjsessionid=2L4ba0F4AzkTY81iUIfsQofxLT17RXSiMKwoeyRugEXhU4xLrO0os54bmpUcYXrb?pstSeq=54769&pageIndex=6>



### Convergence of the Alternative Agri-Food Movement and Food Sovereignty Movement

Korea's agriculture and food crises have deepened as the nation has faced challenges such as food aid, the spread of the green revolution, and the full opening of agricultural markets to imports. Various resistance and alternative movements have emerged to address such crises. The development of these resistance and alternative movements has had two main directions in terms of the players and core values pursued.

First, the alternative agri-food movement initiated by some farmers who adopted organic agriculture as an alternative to industrial agriculture later evolved into a producer-consumer linkage movement. In the 1970s, the Korean Catholic Farmers' Movement (CCFM), a member of the International Federation of Adult Catholic Farmers' Movements (FIMARC) and Right Farming Association established, through exchanges with Japanese farmers, an organic farming movement amid growing awareness of the hazards of chemical farming. Direct trade of agricultural products cultivated by organic farming has increased since small-scale direct trade started between farmers and citizens in the 1980s and later direct trade through Consumers' Cooperatives in the 1990s. As a result, the organic farming movement evolved into an alternative agri-food movement linking producers and consumers. In particular, with the enactment of the Environment-friendly Agriculture Promotion Act in 1997 and Consumer Cooperatives Act in 1999, the production and consumption of eco-friendly agricultural products increased sharply in the 2000s.<sup>6</sup> In 2009, when the production of eco-friendly agricultural products peaked, 16.6% of farms

6. The Environmentally-friendly Agriculture Promotion Act includes "no-pesticide certification" in which organo-synthetic agricultural chemicals are not used and less than one third of the recommended amount of chemical fertilizers are used, as well as "low-pesticide certification" in which less than half of the permitted amount of pesticide, and less than half of the recommended level of chemical fertilizers are used. Low-pesticide certification was suspended in 2009 and abolished in 2016 (National Agricultural Products Quality Management Service; see <http://www.enviagro.go.kr/portal/content/en/html/sub/system.jsp>).

carried out eco-friendly farming and eco-friendly products accounted for 13.3% of the total agricultural production in Korea.

Second, the peasant movement emerged to protect the rights and interests of peasants and later to resist the agricultural market opening and neoliberalism. In the late 1960s, the gap between agriculture and manufacturing widened as a result of the government's policy to foster a manufacturing industry-led growth. In the early 1970s, peasant movement organizations were formed, demanding a guarantee for farmers' incomes and agricultural products pricing. However, the dissemination of the peasant movement was highly restricted under the military regime in Korea. The peasant movement grew up in the mid-1980s with the democratization movement and supported farmers through the Korean Women Farmer Association founded in 1989 and the Korean Farmers League founded in 1990. It established a unified political stance of opposition to the market opening of agricultural imports.<sup>7</sup> In 1994, it gained popular support by waging a struggle to oppose market opening to imports under the Uruguay Round. Ultimately it suspended imports of rice, a staple grain of Korea, and established an institutional basis to introduce a direct payment system through the enactment of the Special Act on the Implementation of the Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization.

In the 2000s, these two movements encountered new issues. First, as the peasant movement largely focused on economic issues such as opposition to market opening, the guarantee of agricultural products prices, and government purchases of agricultural products, critics said that the peasant movement may have lost its fundamental value as an alternative. Second, although the organic farming movement had evolved

7. As it became an official member of the LVC, the farmers' movement was renamed as the peasants' movement. Instead of the term "farmer" that represents multiple classes in Korea, organizations used the term "peasant" in order to emphasize that they represented a specific class. In 2004, after official approval as a member organization at the LVC's International Conference both organizations changed "farmer" to "peasant" in their name. Their names are now the Korean Women Peasant Association (KWPA) and Korean Peasant's League (KPL).

into an alternative agri-food movement linking producers and consumers, some suspected that the movement was being “conventionalized” as it relied on the government for eco-friendly farming facilities, materials and certification system. These movements were faced with a fundamental question: by whom and how food is produced? In addition, local food, slow food, and fair trade movements newly emerged to fight problems associated with food globalization such as inequity, safety, and disruption between production and consumption. Divergence between existing movements and various alternative movements prompted discussions to answer a fundamental question of “by whom and how food is produced,” and brought about a need to explore practical ways in which individual movements could collaborate.

These issues were resolved through the following two innovations in Korea. First, in the mid–2000s, through the peasant movement’s linkage with transnational peasants’ movements, the concept of food sovereignty was introduced and civic societies promoted discussion of it. In 2001, the KWPA and KPL came into contact with LVC in the World Social Forum and participated in the South East and East Asia regional meeting of LVC as observer organizations. Following an incident in Cancun, Mexico during a WTO Meeting in 2003 in which farmer Lee Kyung Hae committed suicide, they became official members of LVC in 2004. The KWPA launched a food sovereignty movement through linkage with transnational peasants’ movements and reinforced solidarity with various civic organizations through the Native Seeds Movement and Sisters’ Kitchen Garden Subscription Box Project. In 2012, the KWPA was awarded a Food Sovereignty Prize from LVC (Yoon et al. 2013). The KWPA is striving to define food sovereignty suitable to Korea and to reach social consensus by working together with various social organizations. Second, after 2010, the peasant movement, alternative agri-food movement, and local food movement joined forces to create an eco-friendly free school meal movement. The school meal movement, which began as an effort to create a local ordinance for school meals in the 1990s, achieved the change from the commissioned school meal system to a direct management system in the 2000s and an expansion of eco-friendly free school meals after 2010.

Especially in Korea, school meals and local food movements overcame the interruption between production and consumption, which had worsened under the agri-food system led by transnational corporations. They contributed to restoring public confidence in food as a medium as well as promoting the public policy of agri-food. School meals that started with foreign food aid in 1953 are one of the oldest public policies regarding food and developed into the most popular alternative food movement of Korea since the mid–2000s. After the enactment of the School Meals Act in 1981, the proportion of schools offering school meals increased. Since the late 1990s, against neo-liberal policies, school meals that had been mostly supplied by commissioned contractors were converted into a service directly operated by the school itself after massive food poisoning incidents in 2003 and 2006—against the international trend. As eco-friendly free school meals emerged as one of the social issues in the nationwide local elections in 2010, free school meals were expanded nationwide, despite the so-called “age of austerity” after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. In 2009, 16.2% of elementary, middle, and high schools nationwide offered free school meals, but by 2016, 74.3% adopted this policy, including 95.6% of elementary schools.<sup>8</sup> The distribution of eco-friendly agricultural products for school meals rose sharply. A 2014 survey showed that 16.2% of eco-friendly agricultural products were consumed at schools, but increased to 31.5 % in 2015.<sup>9</sup>

8. Chun-jin Kim, “Jeonbuk musang geupsik silsi hakgyo biyul 91.7%” (Implementation of Free School Meals in Jeonbuk Province Is 91.7 Percent), March 15, 2016, <https://blog.naver.com/PostView.nhn?blogId=kimcj334&logNo=220655338806>.

9. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs of Korea, “Chinhwangyeong nongsanmul sobi, hakgyogeupsik-gwa jikgeolae-ga daese” (School Meal and Direct Sales Are Most Important in Consumption of Eco-Friendly Agricultural Products), July 15, 2016, [http://www.mafra.go.kr/list.jsp?newsid=155448282&section\\_id=b\\_sec\\_1&listcnt=5&pageNo=1&year=&group\\_id=3&menu\\_id=1125&link\\_menu\\_id=&division=B&board\\_kind=C&board\\_skin\\_id=C3&parent\\_code=3&link\\_url=&depth=1](http://www.mafra.go.kr/list.jsp?newsid=155448282&section_id=b_sec_1&listcnt=5&pageNo=1&year=&group_id=3&menu_id=1125&link_menu_id=&division=B&board_kind=C&board_skin_id=C3&parent_code=3&link_url=&depth=1).

### **Collaborating Under the New Agenda: Food Sovereignty and Rights of Peasants**

For the past ten years, the Korean free school meal movement has aimed to replace the contract school meal service by companies to one in which this service was directly operated by schools themselves. Local governments enacted ordinances to support free school meal costs and the procurement of eco-friendly food materials. Despite progress made by the school meal movement, however, food material procurement for school meals, like other existing food regimes, relied on farms with a certain scale of production, showing a lack of consideration for small family farms and peasants who can foster an eco-friendly, sustainable food regime. As a result, some local governments began to devise ways to ensure the participation of small-scale farms and peasants in the school meal procurement system. Recognition of the role of small-scale farms as an important contributor to the food regime transition coincided with two major international events. The first was the world food crisis of 2007/08, and the other was the designation of the year 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) by the United Nations. In the wake of the world food crisis, the World Summit on Food Security, held in Rome in 2009, declared that solutions to a food crisis must include the need to re-invest in local agriculture and the right to food (Golay 2010). Furthermore Olivier De Shutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, emphasized that what matters in human rights terms is determining who will produce food, and for the benefit of whom (De Shutter 2008). In this way peasants, the most vulnerable and important entity in terms of the right to food, began to gain attention. An initiative was launched by the World Rural Forum in collaboration with more than 350 civil society and farmers' organizations to declare an International Year of Family Farming. In 2011, the government of the Philippines proposed IYFF in the 37th FAO Congress, and the 66th UN General Assembly officially declared the year 2014 as IYFF (IFAD 2014). During this process, the right to food regained traction and consideration and the rights of peasants presented by LVC, a transnational indigenous peasants' movement, began to be discussed in the

United Nations.

At the same time as such attention was given to peasants and small-holders as indispensable actors in sustainable agriculture after the global food crisis of 2007/08, rights to the food movement were prevalent throughout the world. LVC criticized the privatization of food security and the food system led by businesses and proposed a new food sovereignty concept as an alternative to food security or a real food security. Food sovereignty is broadly defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Forum for Food Sovereignty 2007). The concept of food sovereignty includes a human rights perspective of the right to food and emphasizes people's right to decide their own food system from seed to table. Recently, food sovereignty movements have gradually expanded multilevel practices by encouraging peasants to take action under local, national, and regional circumstances while providing the universal tool of food democracy and rights-based approaches. Each nation began to include the obligations of the state to realize food sovereignty through the amendment of national constitutions and enactment of basic laws. Discussions on officially establishing such rights within the international human rights framework through the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants are underway (Golay 2015).

The declaration of the rights of peasants requested by LVC was drafted in collaboration with international human rights organizations and was included on the official agenda of the UN Human Rights Council. It has taken nearly ten years, and working-level debates to draft a declaration have been underway for five years. Although the declaration has not yet been adopted within the UN General Assembly, the discussions of the past 15 years have significant implications for the international community and nations including Korea. The term "rights of peasants" was coined by the Indonesian Peasants Union (SPI), a member organization of LVC. Later, the first declaration draft was written at the Southeast/East Asia Regional Conference of LVC in 2002 and the declaration was completed at the 6th International Conference in 2008. It was approved by its International



Coordination Committee (ICC) at a meeting that was held in Seoul in March 2009 (Golay 2015, 10n10; LVC 2009). LVC demanded that the rights of peasants should be established as a convention of the UN in its final declaration of the International Conference on Peasant's Rights in 2008 and pushed to make the declaration institutionalized at its international body.<sup>10</sup> International human rights organizations such as FIAN and CETIM have worked together with LVC regarding peasants' issues with regard to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and drafted a declaration on the rights of peasants, ensuring that this draft was discussed within the framework of the United Nations (Clayes 2015, 56–58). As the rights of peasants and family farming began to be recognized in the wake of the 2007/08 food crisis, in 2009 the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, respectively, invited LVC and listened to its opinion on a declaration of the rights of peasants. An advisory committee of the UN Human Rights Council was inaugurated in 2008 to give more attention to the right to food issue and proposed needs for the UN Human Rights Council to study food crises, the right to food, agricultural subsidy, and the rights of peasants. The UN Human Rights Council instructed the Advisory Committee to launch a study on policies and strategy to eliminate discrimination toward rural communities in terms of the right to food. Research on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas was conducted from 2010 to 2012 (Golay 2015, 11–14). Through this process, LVC and international human rights organizations successfully made the rights of peasants an official agenda item of the United Nations through a decision (see Resolution of the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/RES/21/19) regarding the establishment of an open-ended intergovernmental working group (OEIWG) to draft a declaration at the UN Human Rights Committee in 2012. A procedure for making a declaration is underway. Recently, in the fifth session of OEIWG held on April 5, 2018, a draft declaration was

10. La Vía Campesina, "Final Declaration of International Conference on Peasants' Rights," June 24, 2008, <https://viacampesina.org/en/final-declaration-of-international-conference-on-peasants-rights>.

discussed, and in the 39th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council the declaration was adopted. This declaration is to be confirmed by the 73rd UN General Assembly in November 2018.

**Table 2.** Adopted Resolutions and Major Decisions on the Promotion and Protection of the Human Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas

HRC Session	Year	Resolution (result of the vote)	Major decisions
21th	2012	A/HRC/RES/21/19 (YES 23/ABST 15/NO 9)	To establish an open-ended intergovernmental working group with the mandate of negotiating, finalizing and submitting to the Human Rights Council a draft United Nations declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, on the basis of the draft submitted by the Advisory Committee, and without prejudging relevant past, present and future views and proposals  That the working group shall hold its first session for five working days in 2013, before the 23rd session of the Human Rights Council
26th	2014	A/HRC/RES/26/26 (YES 29/ABST 13/NO 5)	That the working group with the mandate of negotiating, finalizing and submitting to the Human Rights Council a draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas shall hold its second session for five working days before the 29th session of the Council  That the Chairperson-Rapporteur of the working group should be asked to prepare a new text on the basis of the discussions held during the first session of the working group, including on the draft declaration presented by the Advisory Committee, and for informal consultations to be held, and to present these to the working group at its second session for consideration and further discussion
30th	2015	A/HRC/RES/30/13 (YES 31/ABST 15/NO 1)	That the working group with the mandate to negotiate, finalize and submit to the Human Rights Council a draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas shall hold its next two annual sessions for five working days each before the 36th session of the Council

33th	2016	A/HRC/33/59 (Report of the Chair-Rapporteur, No Vote)	That the Chair-Rapporteur should prepare a revised text on the basis of the discussions held during the first, second, and third sessions of the working group.
36th	2017	A/HRC/RES/36/22 (YES 34/ABST 11/ NO 2)	That the open-ended intergovernmental working group on a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas shall hold its fifth annual session for five working days before the 38th session of the Human Rights Council, in accordance with its mandate, to negotiate, finalize and submit to the Council a draft United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas;  That the updated version of the draft declaration that will be presented by the Chair-Rapporteur of the working group at its fifth session, taking into consideration the report of the Chair-Rapporteur on the fourth session, and the version of the draft declaration resulting from the fifth session will be translated into all official languages of the United Nations;
39th	2018	A/HRC/RES/39/12 (YES 33/ABST 11/ NO 3)	Adoption of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, as contained in the annex to the resolution.

Source: United Nations Human Rights Council Resolutions.

As a member of Human Rights Council, South Korea voted four times. South Korea voted against resolution A/HRC/RES/26/26 and abstained from voting on resolution A/HRC/RES/30/13, A/HRC/RES/36/22, and A/HRC/RES/39/12. The Korean government's shift from opposition to abstention may be a meaningful change, but despite a strong opposition from peasants' organizations, the government continued to abstain until the end.

Recently in Korea, with the movement to revise the constitution, various alternative agri-food movements (peasants' movement, school meals movement, consumer cooperatives movement and so on) are collaborating under a new agenda of the rights of peasants. These groups once formed a nationwide coalition at a candlelight vigil to voice their opposition to the import of US beef in 2008 and jointly conducted an eco-friendly free school meals movement in the 2010 local elections. During this process, they agreed on the need to shift to a sustainable agri-

food system that as the common objective of all alternative agri-food movements, and translate the value of sustainability into a system. As a result, the Headquarters, comprised of major agricultural organizations, organic farming organizations, consumer cooperatives, and school meal organizations was launched in October 2017 to push for the revision of the constitution in the agriculture sector.

A democratic government was inaugurated and the constitution was revised in 1987 as a result of the democratization movement. However, at that time, clear evidence of damage from neoliberalism and globalization had yet to appear, and sustainable agriculture was not sufficiently understood. Therefore a separate provision regarding agriculture and food was not considered in discussions regarding the revision of the constitution. With the full opening of the agricultural product market that placed peasants and small-holders as the main pillar of Korea's agriculture production into crisis, discussions on food security resumed after the world food crisis and the insertion of a provision on the guarantee of sustainable agriculture in the constitution became an important social issue. As discussions of food sovereignty spread within the alternative agri-food movement, efforts were made to reflect the agricultural production model envisioned by a declaration of the rights of peasants in the constitution, thereby ensuring that small-scale farmers and peasants are incorporated as important producers in school meal, public meal and local food strategies. In this process, tensions and conflicts related to the content of the revised constitution have emerged among the alternative agri-food movement, mainstream food regime entities and policy makers, and even within alternative agri-food movement participants.

### Conclusion: Evolution of the Food Sovereignty Movement and Its Challenges

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants is very significant in that it could create critical momentum to evolve the outcome of the food

sovereignty movement into an international system. Historically, social movements have facilitated institutionalization and this institutionalization has invigorated the same social movements, creating a virtuous cycle. Evidence of this can be found within Korea's alternative agri-food movement.

The organic farming movement, which started to resist green revolution agriculture in the 1970s, has evolved into a popular alternative agri-food movement through eco-friendly product certification and institutionalization through consumers' cooperatives. In the 1990s, the peasant movement, which gained popular support through its opposition to opening to imports and neoliberalism, has become an important civic movement and political force. Nevertheless, these movements have revealed a preference for conventionalization and focused on economic issues while exhibiting weakness as a societal movement seeking alternatives to various social issues. In the late 2000s, as discussions on food sovereignty gained support from civic society and the school meal movement formed solidarity with other social movements, the alternative agri-food movement revived in Korea. Recently, as several agendas pursued by the alternative agri-food movement achieved institutionalization, it has been revitalized. First, the alternative agri-food movement successfully pushed for the establishment and policy implementation for a "public plate" and "local food strategy" to be included as one of the campaign pledges of candidate Moon Jae-in, who was elected president in 2017. Second, the alternative agri-food movement encouraged some local governments to adopt and implement public plate and local food strategies. The Seoul Metropolitan Government drew from a consensus on rights to food and food sovereignty among civic organizations and adopted the public plate as one of its local food projects.

Expanding eco-friendly free school meals such as public plates and promoting local food strategy in local governments are attempts to institutionalize the alternative agri-food movement on a sub-national level. Efforts to include the principle of food sovereignty in the national constitution through an amendment would mean an institutionalization of food sovereignty on a national level. In this respect, the declaration of

the rights of peasants has two important implications for the revision of agriculture-related provisions of the constitution. First, it strongly supports the argument of the alternative agri-food movement that the principle of food sovereignty should be included in discussions of the constitutional amendment. Mainstream food regime entities assert that the nation's agricultural sector, dominated by small family farming and small-scale producers, is inefficient and lacks a vision for the future. Against such arguments, an international recognition of the food sovereignty model through a declaration of the rights of peasants would act as a powerful support, in addition to the alternative agri-food models being built on a sub-national level. Second, it is creating tension due to differing views on food sovereignty inside the alternative agri-food movement and also providing an opportunity to review the movement itself. The variety of views on food sovereignty, sustainable peasant, and family farm agriculture, which have not been exhibited in the process of fighting the government's neoliberal agricultural policy, are being revealed. The dynamics of the movement are observed on various occasions. Differences were clearly exhibited over the minimum wage hike among organizations that participated in the constitutional amendment campaign. The Korean Advanced Farmers' Federation (KAFF) criticized the minimum wage hike as it does not consider the difficulties of farmers. The KAFF said that the increased minimum wage raises the cost of immigrant workers as well as local workers in the agricultural sector, thus adding pressure to the overall agricultural economy. That provided an opportunity to look at the agricultural immigrant workers issue, which previously had not drawn attention from the alternative agri-food movement. On the other hand, as the peasant movement continues to focus on economic issues, it gives the impression that it avoids presenting a clear stance on the future agenda of agriculture, which seeks an answer to a question "by whom and how food will be produced?," as is contained in the food sovereignty movement and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants.

This paper derived implications of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants with regard to the food sovereignty movement and institutionalization, by reviewing historical changes and crises of

agriculture in Korea and by looking into the development and limitations of the alternative agri-food movement. As a solid consensus has not been reached on the implications of a declaration of the rights of peasants in Korea, this research could not make a detailed analysis. Further research is needed to analyze diverse views about food sovereignty, and the declaration of the rights of peasants as well as the dynamics inside the movement such as the tension and conflict of interests among farmers. Additionally, more research is required to pursue and analyze the underlying reasons why social movements repeat a cycle of evolution and conventionalization and how such a dialectic evolution of social movements is related to a change in agriculture and farms. This may enable us to identify factors enabling alternative agri-food movement to have a virtuous cycle of institutionalization and evolution, instead of a vicious cycle of institutionalization and conventionalization.

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