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LWA Statement on UK Food Security Concerns in light of War in Ukraine

The crimes taking place in Ukraine have sent shockwaves of deep sadness and uncertainty across the globe. While we don't mean to downplay the intense suffering of those who remain within Ukraine's borders, and those who have been forced to flee their homes, we feel that it is important to also address the imminent food crisis which is developing as a consequence of the instability and violence in the regions, as well as how best to respond.

The current global panic over food security sparked by the situation in Ukraine is a brutal reminder of the vulnerabilities which lie at the core of our globalised commodity food system; a system reliant on mass international trade, chemical inputs and fossil fuel power.

The Landworkers' Alliance wants to be clear that now more than ever we must be pushing for food and farming systems based on the principles of agroecology and food sovereignty. Measures to improve short-term food security need not, and must not, compromise the longer-term need for environmentally sustainable and resilient food systems.

We stand in solidarity with farmers, food producers and peasants in Ukraine. On top of being subjected to the violence and war crimes of Russian aggressors, their inability to plant seed, to access their farmland and to source fuel for their machinery, coupled with a loss of revenue from exported goods, means that many fields will be left empty this planting season, and countless farmers face destitution.

Already, the situation in Ukraine is having serious ramifications for the global commodity food system. Ukraine and Russia combined produce nearly 30% of the world's wheat exports, and for countries in the Middle East and North Africa who are particularly reliant on grain imports from the Ukraine - the threat of food insecurity is imminent. As ever, it is countries in the Global South who stand to feel the harshest impacts of this food crisis. However, as the UK relies on foreign imports for over half of the food it consumes, food prices have hit record highs as a result of the crisis and so the issue of food security has been rushed onto the political agenda.

Despite the glaring vulnerabilities of our current food and farming systems, poorly judged calls for increased productivity, intensification, and expansion of food production in the UK are being made by key lobbying organisations. The National Farmers' Union in Scotland (NFUS) have called for a [moratorium on support scheme rules](#) to allow for the planting of crops on legumes on land designated as Ecological Focus Area land (land which currently only permits farming practices which benefit the climate and environment, with the aim of improving biodiversity). In England, there have been suggestions that Defra might delay the roll-out of the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS), which are designed to foster more environmentally sustainable farming practices, but have been unfairly criticised by NFU and others as posing a threat to agricultural productivity.

Suggestions are also being made to intensify production at the EU level as a means to stabilise food security, but such decisions would likely amount to the rolling back of sustainable food policy objectives laid in the Farm to

Fork Biodiversity strategies. In Germany, for example, the government has announced that over a [million hectares of 'greening land'](#) will be allowed to enter production in response to the developing food crisis.

Not only are these calls for intensifying and expanding food production environmentally regressive, but they are also flawed.

80% of the cereals produced in Scotland, and over half of the arable crops in the UK are grown for animal feed or alcohol, and two-thirds of cereals grown in the EU are used for either biofuels or animal feed. We desperately need to change the way we use our arable land, to ensure that crops are grown first and foremost for human nutrition.

In Scotland, much of the land designated as EFAs is either unsuitable for cereal production as it is close to ditches and along field margins, or is permanent grassland already providing forage for livestock, as well as valuable habitat and holding reserves of carbon which would be released if grassland were ploughed. Ploughing this land for crop production would not improve food security in Scotland, and the environmental fall out would vastly outweigh any marginal increase in food output.

It's also important to note that Russia is the world's largest chemical fertiliser producer. This means that sanctions placed on the Kremlin will massively compromise access to fertiliser for the UK market and other importing countries. With the current rising prices for fuel and fertiliser, for many farmers in the UK it is not economically viable to plant their normal area of crops, let alone plough and plant extra. For farmers, not only does reliance on chemical inputs shrink their profit margins, but it also severely reduces environmental and climatic resilience. The current situation therefore calls for an acceleration of the transition towards regenerative, organic and agroecological agriculture, which is not reliant on artificial or imported chemicals.

We welcome the statement made by Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs Mairi Gougeon in which she stresses that: *"Events in Ukraine, tragic as they are, do not lessen the adverse global impacts on the climate and on biodiversity that we are facing. Indeed, they only strengthen the case for doing more because, ultimately, that is how we can make our farms and food production systems more resilient."*

We firmly believe that the only way to meet threats to food security is to pursue and strengthen a sustainable and nature-friendly agricultural transition. Food security need not come at the expense of food sovereignty and environmental farming practices.

The Landworkers' Alliance therefore makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Use UK arable land to grow crops for human consumption and nutrition; rather than for producing livestock feed, alcohol and biofuels.**
- 2. Initiate a rapid phasing out of chemical inputs in the agriculture sector, and accelerate the transition to environmentally sustainable farming practices.**
- 3. Strengthen resilient local and regional food systems which are not reliant on imports.**
- 4. Put in place robust economic measures to reduce food poverty in the UK.**

We believe that a vision for a better food and farming system is one which should be driven by farmers and food producers, with the aim of producing healthy food for local and global populations, as opposed to commodity crops for shareholder profits. This is what our members have to say:

"Food security isn't about having more productive land, it is about de-commodifying food, building frameworks for food sovereignty and addressing inequalities in the food system."

Nikki Yoxall, farmer in Aberdeenshire

"With around 80% of Scotland's cereal going towards alcohol production and animal feed, and less than 0.1% of Scottish wheat used for bread, the logic that in order to "address the growing concerns around future food security" we simply need to grow more crops is deeply flawed. But for the NFUS to use the tragic and ongoing humanitarian crisis to attempt to push through a far-reaching change in agenda is, unfortunately, shameful."

Col Gordon, farmer in Invergordon

“Frankly it is outrageous to reverse the small amounts of biodiversity protected through strips of untouched land when more food could be produced through growing food for direct consumption by humans, not animals. Two, far more worthwhile, steps would be to give incentives to all landowners with land next to or near communities to offer small areas of land for Community Supported Agriculture, and to reintroduce school kitchens which can offer locally sourced food.”

Anne Thomson, grower near Brechan

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**The Landworkers' Alliance is a grassroots union of farmers,
forester's and land-based workers in the UK.**