

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST FOREIGN ACQUISITIONS

Large investors are buying up land in developing countries. The locals often suffer as a result. They lose their land and access to food.

Since the commodity boom and the financial and economic crisis that followed in 2007–8, fertile farmland has become a focus for investment. Foreign states and companies, as well as national investors are buying or leasing land in developing countries – often to the detriment of the local population. It is hard to tell how much land is affected because reliable information is scarce and report-

ing opaque. The “Land Matrix”, an independent land-monitoring initiative, currently lists deals that affect more than 39 million hectares of land worldwide; an area larger than Germany, or about the size of Zimbabwe. Oxfam even speaks of 200 million hectares; the size of France, Germany, Spain, Poland, Italy and the United Kingdom combined. The World Bank economist, Klaus Deininger, says that “land grabbing” affects between 10 and 30 percent of the arable land worldwide.

The reasons for this trend lie in both the developed and developing worlds. Expanding cities, mines, infrastructure projects and higher prices for agricultural commodities make land a profitable investment. Factors such as lack of water, as in Saudi Arabia, changes in diets, as in China, or biofuel policy, as in the European Union, reinforce the hunger for land among states and companies. The governments of developing countries encourage investment in agriculture to boost yields and improve nutrition. Authoritarian governments use land sales to fill treasury coffers; corrupt officials use these deals to line their own pockets.

Land deals take place all over the world. Particularly in Africa, large areas that are bought or inherited are designated as “degraded” or “unused”, and do not appear in statistics that cover only fertile land.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the rural poor collect up to 80 percent of their food from wild plants during hunger periods – despite the fact that they lack the formal right to do so. A 2009 World Bank report on Tanzania says that most of the building materials, energy and traditional medicines used by the rural population comes from “unused” forests. Designating the land in this way is unrealistic but highly political.

Land grabs often lead to evictions of people who live and farm there – especially of people who lack formal rights or the means to fight back. Indigenous people, smallholders, women and pastoralists are particularly hard-hit. Moving into the city may be their only option, further accelerating already-rapid urbanization. Access to land gives people access to food. This is especially important where people have no social safety net and few other income opportunities.

The impact of ownership transfers varies from place to place. In Ethiopia, the Anuak people were expelled from fertile parts of the Gambella region and had to resettle on barren land. Their food situation has deteriorated markedly as a result. In Madagascar, the government tried to sell 1.3 million hectares of arable land to Daewoo, a South Korean conglomerate. The resulting unrest led to a coup in 2009.

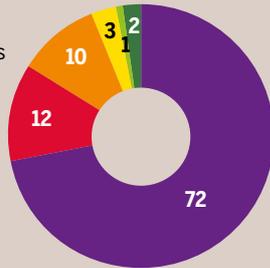
Most farms are tiny – but governments seldom support the needs of smallholders

MOST ARE SMALL

Comparing farms, 2013 estimates*

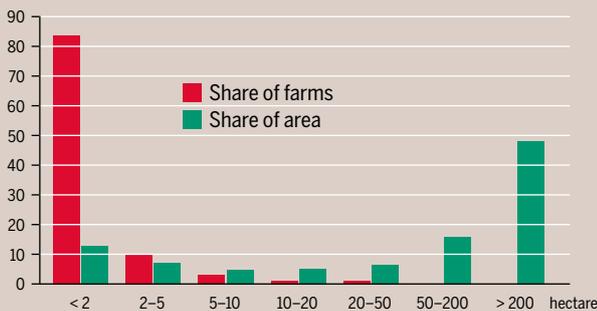
Farm sizes, percentage of 460 million farms in 111 countries

- < 1 hectare
- 1–2 hectares
- 2–5
- 5–10
- 10–20
- > 20

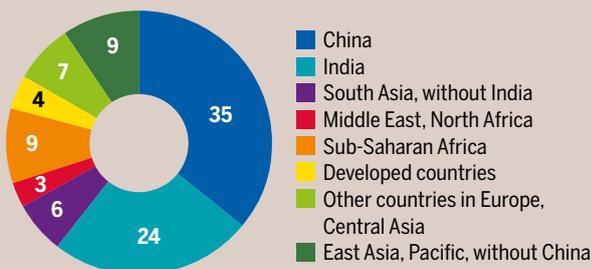


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Distribution of agricultural land by farm size, 106 countries, in percent



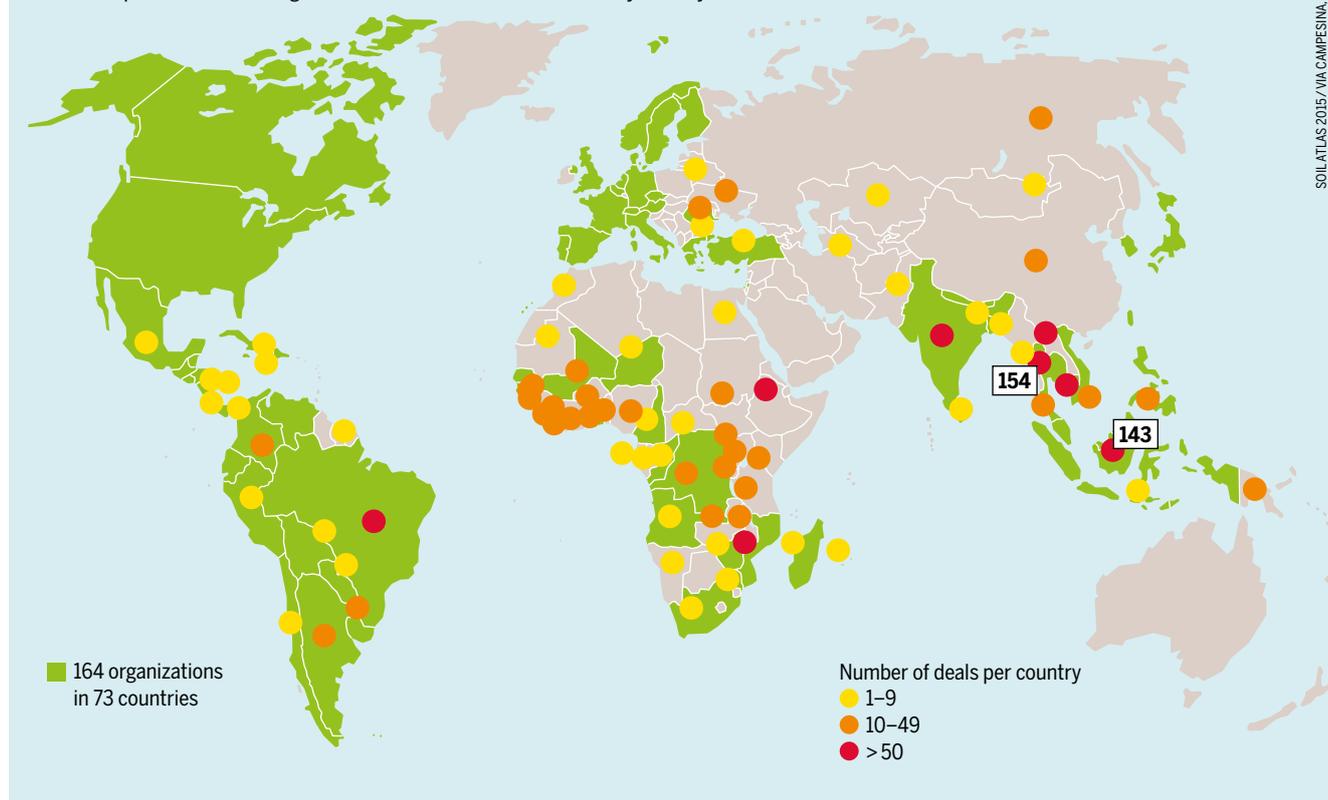
Distribution of 570 million farms by region, 161 countries, in percent



*According to census data collected at irregular intervals until 2005; more recent data are not available.

FARMER SOLIDARITY AND INVESTOR ACTIVITIES

Members of the smallholder network "Via Campesina" 2013 and land purchases exceeding 200 hectares and more, 2000–2011, by country



Farmers worldwide are affected by land grabbing – and they are organizing themselves to defend their rights

After elections at the end of 2007 in Kenya, disputes over land between the members of different tribes contributed to bloody clashes. Developed countries are not immune to these problems; small-scale farmers often complain about outside investors buying up land and pushing up prices.

Social movements involved in agriculture and nutrition are increasingly concerned by investors' greed for land as well as access to seed and clean water. As varied as they are, these movements are united by the same goal – to secure access to land and food sovereignty for small farmers and marginalized groups.

In India, the landless movement, Ekta Parishad, has staged protest marches to push the issue of land reform onto the political agenda. The international network of Via Campesina ("Farmers' Way") represents the interests of the landless and small farmers; it documents land grabbing and evictions worldwide, and links together the various movements with their multitude of interests and motivations.

This is also the goal of a grassroots movement that emerged in February 2007. In Sélingué, in Mali, 500 representatives of small farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous people, ranchers, consumers, environmental and women's groups as well as social movements from the cities adopted the "Nyéléni Declaration for Food Sovereignty".

The term "food sovereignty" was coined by Via Campesina, which sees it as a way to democratize food production.

Countries should develop their own independent agricultural and food policies. The means of production, such as land, water and seeds, should be in the hands of small farmers; they must not be monopolized by major agro-industrial concerns. This implies that governments represent the interests of small producers and are able to prevail against the interests of investors. ●

Countries with weak or corrupt governments are attractive for speculators

WHERE SPECULATORS FEEL MOST AT HOME

World Bank Good Governance scores, for countries with and without land deals, 2000

