

The People's Agroecology Process:

Unlocking Our Power
through Agroecology



Photo of tree planting at the 7th International Meeting of Agroecology, Sustainable Agriculture, and Cooperativism in Cuba, organized by the National Association of Small Farmers of Cuba (ANAP).

Photo Credit: Brooke Porter



“The People’s Agroecology Process brings dialogue to the community on how agroecology can work as an alternative to our current food system and to reclaim knowledge that has been taken away from us. It’s a source of empowerment and leads to conversations that we don’t often have, because we live in a society that has trained us to work against each other. One of the goals of the People’s Agroecology Process is to amplify the struggles taking place within different communities. Each community is different so each agroecology encounter has its own perspective.”

— **Kathia Ramirez**

The Farmworker Support Committee (United States)



2015 Encounter
hosted by the
Farmworker
Association of
Florida (FWAF).

Photo Credit: FWAF

Contents

Introduction	3
History of the People's Agroecology Process	5
Method and Pedagogy	7
Reclaiming Our Power: Organization, Formation and Struggle	11
Our Methodology	13
Contextual Analysis	15
Organization of an Agroecology Encounter	17
Six Core Methodologies	19
Maintaining the Process	21



2015 Encounter
hosted by the
Farmworker
Association of
Florida (FWAF).

Photo Credit: FWAF



2015
Encounter
in Cuba.

Photo Credit:
CATA
Farmworkers

Introduction

The People's Agroecology Process emerged in 2015 as a grassroots-led initiative to scale out agroecology in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. It was inspired by the work of allied organizations involved in the transnational peasant and small-scale farmer movement, La Via Campesina—the world's largest rural social movement with over 200 million members in more than 80 countries. In our collective, we believe that agroecology has the power to mobilize and inspire millions to take back the land, seeds and food appropriated and controlled by transnational corporations. As Jesús Vázquez from Organization Boricuá for Ecological Agriculture in Puerto Rico explains,

“Agroecology is a tool for organizing in opposition to corporate power. Agroecology cannot be defined exclusively in terms of sustainable and healthy food production. When we work together as farmers, farm workers, peasants, and food sovereignty activists, we do it to develop a strong platform to create policy, to influence public opinion, to educate each other, to mobilize against corporations that are putting our lives and livelihoods at risk.”

This publication summarizes the overarching framework, practices and experiences of the protagonists of the People's Agroecology Process. It is not a step-by-step manual, nor does it intend to be a comprehensive response to the many questions facing our movements. Our intention is to reflect on our process and to share with other organizers some tools we have used for political education and base building to “scale out” (massify) agroecology. By traveling along the same path as others in territories across the world, we hope that more communities will learn from and share similar practices to strengthen a common analysis and platform that “unlocks” our power through agroecology.



What is Agroecology?

The grassroots organizations of small-scale farmers, peasants, landless workers, Indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, women and youth in La Via Campesina see agroecology as “a social, cultural, and political process and a tool for the collective transformation of reality.” Agroecology creates the social and material infrastructure for food producers of all kinds to remain on the land (in rural, coastal and urban spaces) and to ‘break free’ from white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy and other forms of exploitation.

“You see a lot of cooptation right now. Academics in universities and government officials use the word agroecology. Corporate agroecology and co-opted agroecology is just a way of being trendy in the food movement. It's just capitalism evolving more. It's the same thing we've seen with organic agriculture, right? So, it's extremely important that we always hold onto the political side of agroecology because it's the main focus of revolutionizing power in the food system to give power back to the people who work the land, who are living on the land.”

— **Pierre-Olivier Brassard**

Union Paysanne/La Via Campesina (Canada)

“One of the things that I like about agroecology is that you can have a personal connection to it, regardless of where you are located because it focuses on where you are and what you can do in that setting or location. What you are doing in that location includes the Indigenous people of that space too. It is always important to ask about what Indigenous peoples are doing on their land and how or whether they are being acknowledged in the work you are doing.”

— **Nia Holley**

Eastern Woodlands Rematriation (United States)



History of the People's Agroecology Process

The People's Agroecology Process was born out of a collective analysis by U.S. and international allies during the First Campesino a Campesino Agroecology Encounter hosted by the Farmworker Association of Florida.

“At a panel entitled *Popular Agroecology - folks from the Landless Workers Movement of Brazil (MST), Organización Boricua of Ecological Agriculture of Puerto Rico and Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF)* shared the need for a political and culturally grounded model of agroecology in the U.S. and essentially that was the genesis. That was the inspiration. That was the call: that the groups present at that event should continue going forward together; should continue building a shared understanding of each other and our struggles. And from that, develop some sort of process that could allow for the articulation of the group to continue.”

— Blain Snipstal

Small-scale farmer and natural builder, Black Dirt Farm Collective (United States)

Energized by the protagonism of farmworkers, a collective was formed to study, reflect and coordinate actions to scale out agroecology sharing the perspective of La Via Campesina to “massify” and build power from the ground up. This grassroots-led process would be further shaped by communities of color in alliance with farmers from Canada, Puerto Rico and the U.S.

The common strategy from the beginning was to bypass the influence of the non-profit industrial complex by building forms of collaboration among different communities to nourish political education and action. The People's Agroecology Process grew steadily with the organization of agroecology encounters and the coordination among different social sectors, especially groups led by people of color. The People's Agroecology Process embodies the spirit of grassroots internationalism, strengthening links between La Via Campesina, the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, the Climate Justice Alliance and other formations.



Timeline:

2014

Farmworkers in Florida participated in international learning exchanges in Brazil and Guatemala

2015

The First Campesino a Campesino Agroecology Encounter in Florida & First Delegation to the International Agroecology Encounter in Cuba

2016

Efforts to scale out agroecology in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico, including the Mid-Atlantic Agroecology Encounter, participation in the International Forum on Agroecology in Mali and the Agroecology Camp-Encounter in Aibonito, Puerto Rico

2017

First Encounter of Facilitators of the People's Agroecology Process in Boston, MA; the Agroecology Camp-Encounter in Toa Alta, Puerto Rico

2018

Organization of regional agroecology encounters in the U.S. in the Pacific Northwest and the Northeast and the II Encounter of Facilitators in Tarrytown, NY

2019

Third Encounter of Facilitators of the People's Agroecology Process in New Brunswick, Canada and participation in the VII International Agroecology Encounter in Cuba



Member of The Farm School helps at the Wampanoag Oyster Farm, 2018 Northeast Agroecology Encounter.

Photo Credit:
Organización Boricua

Method and Pedagogy

“We need to bring agroecology to a point that people understand the importance of scaling out and scaling up agroecology. The Process is the tool. It is the common struggle of being in revolution and massifying agroecology as a methodology for social transformation and as a way to realize food sovereignty.”

— Pierre-Olivier Brassard

Union Paysanne/La Via Campesina (Canada)

Before diving into the description of our experience to scale out agroecology, we believe that it is important to explain how we organize in the People's Agroecology Process, and to understand our method, methodology and pedagogy. Method is *what* we do in pursuit of a goal. Methodology is *how* the method is implemented. Without defining where we want to go, and our political context, it is likely that our method and methodology will be inadequate. In contrast, with a clear sense of our path forward, we can be successful.

Importantly, we believe that the methods we are using must work to dismantle barriers and social divisions that have permeated our organizing, including:

- Individualism at the core of the dominant capitalist ideology, enforced through institutions including the non-profit industrial complex;
- Competition and the mentality of working in silos, as well as the divisions among communities and working peoples;
- Systemic and interpersonal violence of white supremacy and patriarchy;
- Fear of repression by state police and military apparatus and;
- The culture of U.S. exceptionalism enforced by domestic and international policies (imperialism).

In a broad sense, pedagogy is the way we learn together and “form” ourselves as individuals and collectives towards collective liberation.

In the People's Agroecology Process, our pedagogy is grounded in values of social transformation. It is based on the premise that we make our own history. We are not passive actors. We embrace both theory and practice, and give them equal importance. We also learn by studying and reflecting on the experiences of organizers who came before us.



2019 International
Agroecology
Encounter Cuba.

Photo Credit: Brooke Porter



**Opening Plenary
of the Pacific
Northwest
Encounter 2018.**

Photo Credit: Community
Alliance for Global Justice



**Wampanoag
Fisherman Corey
Hendricks leading
a hands-on
workshop on
oyster restoration
in Cape Cod,
Massachusetts
at the Northeast
Agroecology
Encounter in 2018.**

Photo Credit: WhyHunger



**Wampanoag
Fisherman and
Bake Master Vernon
"Buddy" Pocknett
and wife Renee
Lopes-Pocknett
engage participants
on a traditional
Wampanoag
clambake.**

Photo Credit: WhyHunger

“Talking about agroecology in Puerto Rico, you can't just talk about it without addressing Puerto Rico's colonial history. In an Afroecology encounter, you can't talk about food and agriculture without talking about the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and white terrorism. On Nipmuc land, it's impossible to talk about agroecology without talking about colonialism and genocide and the past 500 years of Indigenous struggle. And all of these systems are inextricably linked to patriarchy, heterosexism, and all of these dynamics that undermine our communities.”

— Corbin Laedlein

Organizer from Brooklyn, New York (United States)



2018 Northeast
Agroecology
Encounter.

Photo Credit:
Organización Boricúa

Reclaiming Our Power: Organization, Formation and Struggle

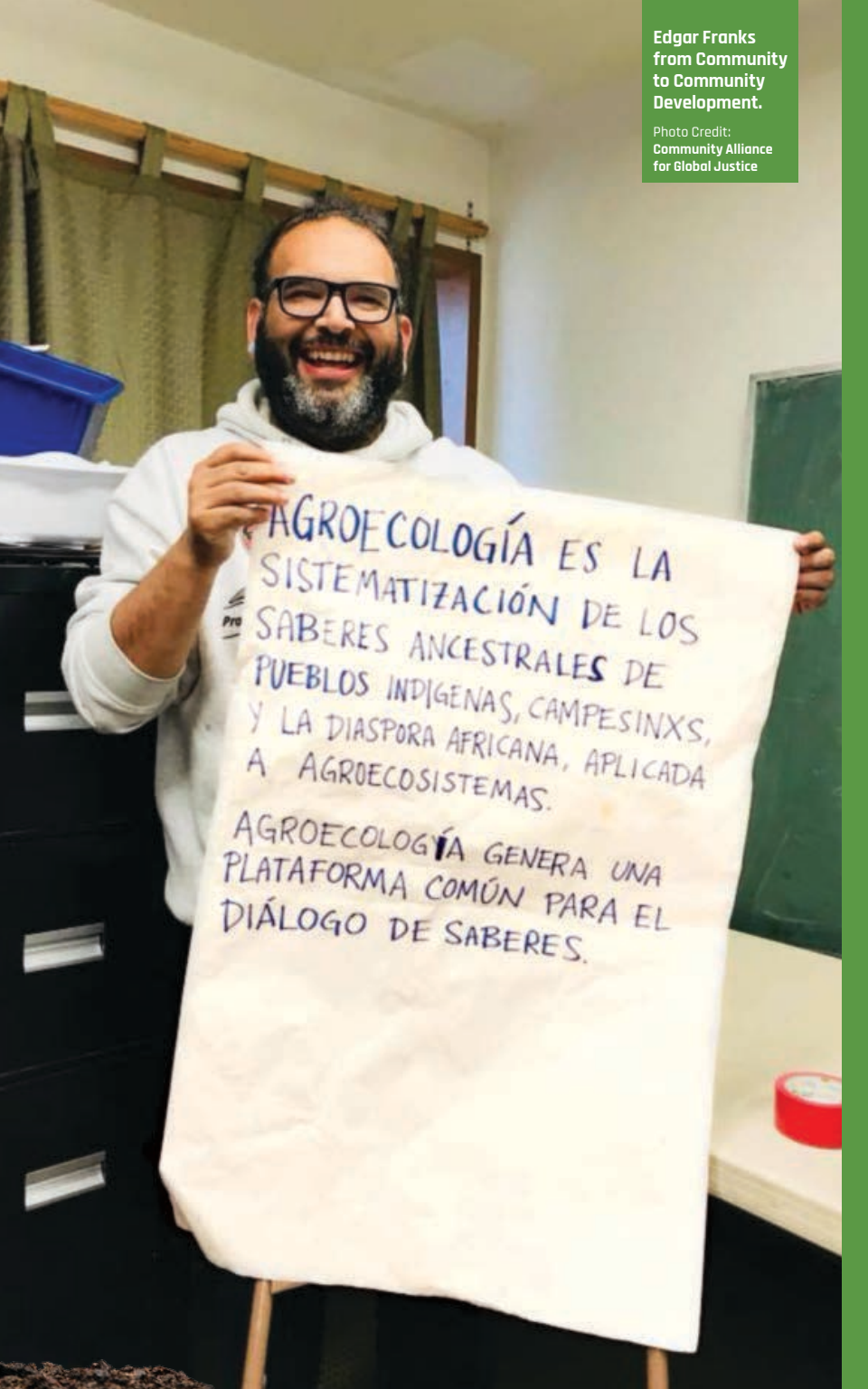
The methodology and pedagogy of the People's Agroecology Process functions along three axes: organization, political training & base building (what many call *formación*, or formation in English) and struggle:

Organization is the engine working to implement our method. This engine gets its fuel from our pedagogical values. We believe that the dominant non-profit industrial model is not only unable to respond adequately to the challenges ahead of us but, in fact, undermines our capacity to build the conditions we need to regain control over our lives and livelihoods. Our organizing tools aim to build a strong collective culture through the division of tasks, as well as individual accountability to values and decision making processes.

Formación is political education intertwined with base building. It is not the same as leadership training, which is centered on individuals. For us, formation is always grounded in organization (including tasks that individuals and collectives are taking on), strategy (the path to achieve our goal), and the struggle itself (confrontation with opposing forces, in this case, industrial agribusiness and corporations). Our formation process - the People's Agroecology Process - is directed by our strategy to scale out agroecology. It is a process to form ourselves as individuals and collectives and to build a strong base with the goal of gaining power to wage a political struggle towards food sovereignty and social transformation.

Struggle against opposing forces is the engine of change. Individuals (participants of a collective) learn from struggle. As our comrades of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) remind us, only the struggle transforms life. The struggle takes different forms, including direct actions in defense of territories and against corporations and settler governments. In order to win, our struggle must go hand in hand with strategies to have strong organization and formation.





AGROECOLOGÍA ES LA
SISTEMATIZACIÓN DE LOS
SABERES ANCESTRALES DE
PUEBLOS INDÍGENAS, CAMPESINXS,
Y LA DIÁSPORA AFRICANA, APLICADA
A AGROECOSISTEMAS.

AGROECOLOGÍA GENERA UNA
PLATAFORMA COMÚN PARA EL
DIÁLOGO DE SABERES.



Afroecology

Our Methodology

“ *Building trust is one of the things we often struggle with in this society. The agroecology encounters are a space to feel safe and build trust. Oftentimes, after ending an agroecology encounter and going back to your daily routine, it can get frustrating. You might feel like you're alone in this process. But after going to these encounters, for me, they have helped me to re-energize myself, re-center myself, and to think strategically about this process of creating change. I think they are really important spaces for encouraging interaction among different communities who face the same struggles, who can come together and work together to build a great movement. Building trust is really important in this process.* **”**

— **Kathia Ramirez**

The Farmworker Support Committee (United States)

Our methodology is grouped into three areas: **(i)** political education through collective study, debate and analysis of socio-economic conditions; **(ii)** technical training through collective work, hands-on and shared knowledge; **(iii)** cultural expression through dialogue, intercultural exchange and *mística* (cultural ritual or ceremony); and **(iv)** internationalism by building a shared analysis with others globally. In our view, the organization of “encounters” creates the conditions to build a shared analysis, forge stronger relationships and promote mutual learning. The encounters require organization. Therefore the first step is to organize a political education group or the Political Pedagogical Coordination.

“*Massifying agroecology has to be related to people’s personal experience. Oftentimes people’s personal experiences are informed by their cultural and larger group experience. Within the context of agroecology we [in African American communities] felt like we had to create Afroecology as a key priority. Then we had to ground it in the Black agrarian experience. There is already a legacy and tradition that needed to be tapped into for agroecology to be of any relevance to Black farmers or to Black people, period. With Afroecology we could intelligently and with power participate in a broader social movement around agroecology.*”

— **Blain Snipstal**

Small-scale farmer and natural builder, Black Dirt Farm Collective (United States)

The Political Pedagogical Coordination (or PPC)

The Political Pedagogical Coordination (or PPC) is a collective composed of representatives of local organizations and allies as observers and supporters. The PPC takes responsibility for coordinating the overall process and activities of the encounter. The PPC members are tasked with developing the political and technical content of the activities that happen within the encounter. The first task of Political Pedagogical Coordination is to build relationships among facilitators and allies to help develop a shared understanding of the process.

As part of this initial step, a few things to consider are:

- Practice “contextual analysis” to develop a collective understanding and analysis of our current conditions among participants. Contextual analysis (defined in the following pages) is a political education tool that deepens our understanding of the reality and history of our struggle. For this task, we usually invite participants who have done it before to demonstrate how it is done.
- We develop a framework for organizing the encounter that is grounded in the struggles and experiences of the community with whom we are organizing. For instance, in the U.S. Northeast, Nipmuc tribal members organized an in-person meeting that included a conversation on food sovereignty and a formal request to the local tribal leadership. In the U.S. Mid-Atlantic, African American organizers developed the *Afroecology* encounter as their local framework (see side-box) in preparation to the regional encounter.
- We practice the methods so all facilitators become familiar with them.



Contextual Analysis

Contextual analysis is a tool that we can use to understand our reality and how to act within that reality. Because it is done collectively, in dialogue, it also can contribute to building a shared analysis among participants. The conditions on the ground are always in flux. It changes constantly so contextual analysis has to be a constant process. Five elements that to contextual analysis are:

- 1 → Understand the other side – the powerful and the real force they have;
- 2 → Analyze our side – our forces, strengths, weaknesses, contradictions, and inabilities;
- 3 → Understand the power of the state – legislative, executive, judicial powers;
- 4 → Understand the different tendencies in the political and economic realms and;
- 5 → Identify the next steps, and possibilities in the current context.

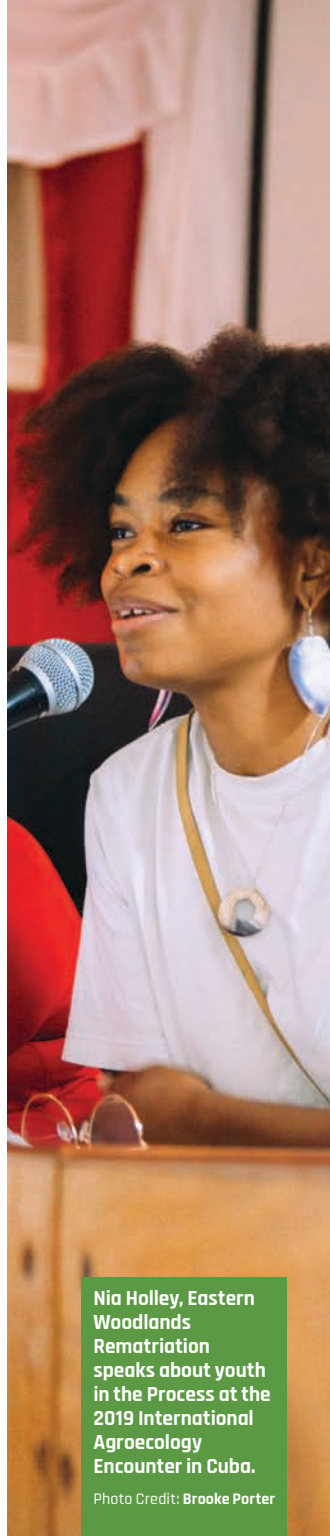
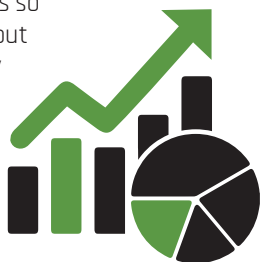
2018 People's Agroecology Process Facilitators Meeting, Tarrytown, NY.

Photo Credit:
Organización Boricúa



Other tips:

- We live in this world with so much information. It is important that our contextual analysis separates what the most pertinent information is from what is secondary. Start with the main information then move to the secondary.
- The group should understand the difference between **structural** and **conjunctural** elements. What is happening now – the conjunctural elements – is related to what has happened in our history, the structural elements.
- Many times, the opinions or initial reactions we have are just a superficial reaction to reality – an “appearance of reality” or “common sense.” But our objective is to go to the essence of reality to uncover what is hidden underneath the superficial level.
- Think about who the actors are and who has important roles as social agents or political forces.
- After you identify the current actors, try to understand the correlation of forces. The correlation of forces is how these different forces within society interact.
- Project into the future different scenarios of winning. The goal of contextual analysis is to strategically define your next move. It is important for us to understand tendencies or trends so that we can figure out how to strategically move forward.



Nia Holley, Eastern Woodlands Rematriation speaks about youth in the Process at the 2019 International Agroecology Encounter in Cuba.

Photo Credit: Brooke Porter



Organization Of The Agroecology Encounter

“I think an encounter is a good way to build relationships. Doing things together like cooking, cleaning, working the land is really helpful to help break down some of the barriers between us. Because of the way the world is set up due to global white supremacy, one of the main issues people face is how we come together. The encounters can create opportunities for building relationships and to have deep conversations, for example, what a land acknowledgement means. We're all looking to navigate this system in the right way, and hopefully eventually not have this system anymore. So relationship building is key to reimagine a world in which everyone has the ability to live and not be in this constant mode of survival. It takes a lot of time but the agroecology encounters can create opportunities for relationships to be made.”

— **Nian Holley**

Eastern Woodlands Rematriation (United States)

Agroecology encounters are not 'events' or conferences bound in time and place. They are an initial step in a long-term process to unlock grassroots power. The encounters are always led by local communities. They provide the space for participants to develop a unified political position and practice agroecology and food sovereignty based on their own experiences and histories. Encounters embrace an internationalist perspective. The agroecology encounters nourish the idea that communities around the

globe share similar challenges and common enemies. Even though they are grounded in different realities, the encounters share similar perspectives and develop a common method, methodology and pedagogy.

The People's Agroecology Process encounters usually include five key elements:

- ① → Stimulate practical, on-the-ground work that is connected to the struggle for food sovereignty;
- ② → Build camaraderie among participants;
- ③ → When the encounter is coming to an end, conclude with a declaration or statement and a list of next steps;
- ④ → Articulate future activities to share experiences and empower our communities and;
- ⑤ → Ensure that all participants of the encounters leave with the responsibility to socialize all the information and knowledge throughout the membership of the groups they represent.

“Our encounter in 2015 was influenced by how we have experienced encounters in the Global South. One beautiful part of the experience was that we made sure there was a mix of time for political dialogue and sharing technical skills. Having that blend is something that has stuck with me, and that I've been sharing with other community organizers as a really good design that supports relationship building in a different way. Rather than only talking, when you use your body and physical energy, you just get to know people in a different way.”

— **Holly Baker**

Climate Justice Alliance (United States)



**2016 Mid-Atlantic
Encounter.**

Photo Credit:
CATA Farmworkers



Corbin Laedlein and Nia Holley cooking together at the Pacific Northwest Encounter, hosted by Community to Community, 2018.

Photo Credit: Community Alliance for Global Justice

Six Core Methodologies

Base Groups — Base groups are groups of five to ten participants, depending on the total number involved in the encounter. Throughout the event, they become like a small family within the larger encounter, reporting to the PPC regarding the wellbeing of participants. In these groups, participants build relationships, discuss themes raised in panels or workshops, perform collective tasks (cleaning, meals, *mística*, note taking, time keeping, etc.) and develop rapport to relate to the larger collective. Base groups will meet two or more times throughout the encounter, depending on the length of time you are together. Each base group is tasked with deciding on a coordinator(s) and coming up with a name and slogan for the group. In our experience, base groups create a dynamic that allows for the active participation of all members in the construction and maintenance of the social dynamics of the encounter.

Místicas — Místicas are used to bring collectives together by representing our struggles and histories through art and culture. They can take the shape of a brief theatrical skit, decorating the space with flags and banners, sharing poetry, song, chants, and more. The word “mística” comes from Latin American social movements and liberation theology to describe the energy that moves us to struggle for collective liberation. Místicas require planning and preparation, and are often done by base groups on a rotational basis at the beginning of each day to ground ourselves, and at the end of the encounter to solidify our time together.

Collective Work — Work should be valued as a learning tool and commitment to the process. The PPC should work with the host organization, farm or community to identify labor needs that participants could contribute as part of the encounter; in addition to the other tasks necessary to run the encounter (health care, misticas, housing, meals, cleaning, etc.). Collective work should be built into the agenda, so participants do not miss other parts of the encounter.

Plenaries — Plenaries are roundtables that include ally scholars or social movement members from the area where the encounter is organized. Plenaries offer critical moments for in-depth reflection of the broader context and issues at stake in realizing food sovereignty. After each plenary, participants are encouraged to share their thoughts, comments and questions.

Workshops — Workshops are moments for exchange among participants regarding agroecological practices and technical knowledge. It is important to encourage the instructors to organize hands-on workshops with accessible language and tools.

Cultural Exchanges — The cultural dimension of our struggle should be front and center in our organizing to give visibility to the different cultural expressions of participants. It includes “cultural evenings” with music, poetry, discussions, meals and celebrations that emphasize our cultures, camaraderie and collective struggle.





Maintaining The Process

Once the encounter is concluded, it is important that the PPC organize an evaluation for the event and determine next steps, including how to stay connected to the larger group. It is part of our commitment as organizations to maintain the connections nationally and internationally and work to eliminate the threats of the non-profit industrial complex that generate competition for resources. Even though the People's Agroecology Process is not an organization, our collective organizes encounters for facilitators (those who participated in Political Pedagogical Coordinations) to further develop and share the strategy, political training and future collaboration.

Being part of the People's Agroecology Process means staying connected to a global process. Our goal is to continue building across sectors and geographies.

**We hope you will join us in
the struggle for agroecology,
food sovereignty and
collective liberation.**

2019 International
Agroecology
Encounter Cuba.

Photo Credit: Brooke Porter



2015 Encounter
hosted by Farmworker
Association of Florida.

Photo Credit: FWAF



Agroecology by the People, for Life and Forever!

BLACK DIRT FARM COLLECTIVE

C A T A

El Comité de Apoyo a Los Trabajadores Agrícolas
The Farmworker Support Committee



Community to Community



FARMWORKER ASSOCIATION OF FLORIDA
LA ASOCIACIÓN CAMPESENA DE FLORIDA
ASOSIYASYON TRAVAYÉ LATÉ NAN FLORID



SAAFON
BLACK FARMING. BLACK HISTORY. BLACK CULTURE

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