

Working the land to feed the people

LEVEL ONE - ELEMENTARY

Pre-reading

Key Vocabulary

These words are important for understanding the text. Match the words with the definitions.

solution	someone who is expected to be in a place but is not there.
reform	a plant grown for food, usually on a farm.
to occupy	a small hard part produced by a plant that can grow into a new plant.
absentee	to improve a situation by correcting things.
landowner	empty or finished, because a supply of something has all been used.
peasant	a way to solve a problem or deal with a bad situation.
to oppose	the substance in which plants grow.
Crop	to be in control of a place that you have entered by force.
fertiliser	a natural or chemical substance which helps plants to grow.
pesticide	a person who owns land.
exhausted	someone who works on another person's farm or their own small farm
soil	a chemical used for killing insects.
seed	to disagree with or disapprove of a plan or policy.

True or False?

Find the answers in the text.

TRUE FALSE

1 Brazil is one of the world's biggest producers of food.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Half of the population of Brazil is hungry.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Twenty years ago more than 5 million people lost their homes in three southern states.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Between 1981 and 1984 277 absentee landlords were murdered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 At first the poor families planted food instead of cash crops.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 The fertilisers and pesticides made them ill.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Now people farm in the same way their parents and grandparents farmed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Between 1995 and 1999 260,000 families got land from the government.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 In the same period nearly 1 million small farmers lost their land.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Monsanto is a big biotech company.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Brazil is one of the world's biggest producers of food but a third of the population is hungry. The governments of the rich countries and the big corporations say that the only solution to this problem is to have free markets and to develop genetically modified food (GM food). But so far this sort of globalisation has only produced more hunger, not less. In Brazil, however, there is a political movement that has a different solution. The Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) - the Landless Rural Workers Movement - is now one of Brazil's biggest popular movements. The MST wants to give power to the poor people of Brazil through land reform and education. The MST takes direct action - it occupies large farms and organises demonstrations in big cities. Many poor Brazilian families are no longer hungry thanks to the work of the MST.

Twenty years ago there was a secret war in the vast interior of Brazil. The war was not a fair one - it was between poor farmers and rich and powerful landowners. Because of this war almost 5 million people lost

their homes in the three southern states of Brazil alone. They became *sem terra* - or landless. They had two choices: to move to the shanty towns of the big cities or to migrate thousands of kilometres north to the government colonies in the Amazon, far from roads, schools and hospitals. Many people who opposed this policy were murdered. Between 1981 and 1984 alone 277 peasant leaders, union officials and rural workers were killed. The MST was born in this climate of violence. Poor families had nothing left to lose so they began to occupy the farms of absentee landowners.

It wasn't easy. At first the families tried to copy the big farmers - planting cash crops instead of food. They used fertilisers and pesticides to try and produce bigger and bigger harvests. But it did not work. Families spent more and more money on pesticides and fertilisers. They became ill from the side effects of the chemicals. The soil was exhausted.

Slowly the families began to use more traditional ways of farming and went back to growing their own food. They believe that chemical farming has no future because it exhausts the soil so rapidly.

Families have now begun to remember the way their parents and grandparents used to farm.

The Brazilian government's reform programme gave land to 260,000 families, but in the same period (1995-99) more than 1 million small farmers lost their land because of the pressure of the market. Only the big exporters of soyabeans, coffee, orange juice and poultry and the multinational companies have been successful. If the battle against GM foods is lost, the big biotech companies, led by Monsanto, will dominate farming by controlling the seed companies.

There is no place for small family farms in this situation, unless they are willing to grow seeds for Monsanto. The MST believes that it can confront these forces and win the battle. But the result is still uncertain. If they lose the battle, it will be a revolution that never happened but if they win, they might bring greater equality and less hunger.

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Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings of the sentences:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 The big corporations say | a is one of Brazil's biggest popular movements. |
| 2 The MST | b a lot of peasant leaders were murdered. |
| 3 20 years ago | c quickly exhausts the soil. |
| 4 Between 1981 and 1984 ... | d GM food can solve the problem of hunger. |
| 5 Many people became ill | e gave land to 260,000 families. |
| 6 Chemical farming | f by controlling the seed companies. |
| 7 The reform programme | g from the side-effects of the chemicals. |
| 8 Big companies will dominate farming | h there was a secret war between rich and poor. |

Vocabulary Work

Find words in the text which are the opposite of these words:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| 1 rich | 6 near |
| 2 very, very small | 7 unfair |
| 3 unpopular | 8 difficult |
| 4 to support | 9 lose |
| 5 more | 10 to forget |

Word Building

Complete the table:

NOUN	VERB
1 production	_____
2 occupation	_____
3 _____	to choose
4 opposition	_____
5 _____	to grow
6 control	_____
7 _____	to murder
8 education	_____

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Discussion

Which of these will be good for the future of the world?

- small farms
- pesticides and fertilisers
- multinational food companies
- traditional farming methods
- GM foods

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KEY

1

solution a way to solve a problem or deal with a bad situation.

reform to improve a situation by correcting things.

to occupy to be in control of a place that you have entered by force

absentee someone who is expected to be in a place but is not there

landowner a person who owns land

peasant someone who works on another person's farm or their own small farm

to oppose to disagree with or disapprove of a plan or policy.

Crop a plant grown for food, usually on a farm.

fertiliser a natural or chemical substance which helps plants to grow.

pesticide a chemical used for killing insects.

exhausted empty or finished, because a supply of something has all been used

soil the substance in which plants grow.

seed a small hard part produced by a plant that can grow into a new plant

2 1t; 2f; 3f; 4f; 5f; 6t; 7t; 8t; 9f; 10t

3 1d; 2a; 3h; 4b; 5g; 6c; 7e; 8f

4 1. poor 2. vast 3. popular 4. to oppose 5. less 6. far 7. fair 8. easy 9. to win 10. to remember

5 1. to produce 2. to occupy 3. choice 4. to oppose 5. growth 6. to control 7. murder 8. to educate